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FULL ASSURANCE.

FULL ASSURANCE;
OR, THE DOCTRINE
OF THE
WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT,
STATED AND DEFENDED.

BY GEORGE MAUNDER.

Fourth Edition.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

VARIOUS considerations have induced the Writer to send the following pages into the world. A deep sense of the great importance of the doctrine here introduced to the attention, and a painful impression concerning the defective views, in reference to this matter, of many serious and sincere persons, have mainly led to the publication of this little volume. Few doctrines have a more immediate bearing upon experimental and practical religion than that of the "Direct Witness of the Spirit;" yet, perhaps, few have been so greatly misunderstood or misrepresented. To lead to serious thought on this subject,—to meet the difficulties of the candid Inquirer,—and, above all, to raise the tone of piety, by stimulating to the personal enjoyment of this great blessing,—

have been the objects sought to be attained. With unaffected diffidence as to the manner in which he has performed his work, yet with strong confidence in the scriptural character of the statements made, the Writer commits this Essay to the press. May the Great Head of the Church accompany it with his blessing!

MANCHESTER, 1847.

Several years have passed since the last edition of this little Work was exhausted. The author has received numerous testimonies as to its usefulness, and requests for its republication. He again sends it forth, slightly enlarged, with earnest prayers that it may promote the Divine Glory.

LEEDS, 1859.

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FULL ASSURANCE.

CHAPTER I.

NEXT to the important question, propounded by Bildad the Shuhite to the afflicted Job, "How can man be justified with God?" there is no inquiry more deeply interesting than the one involved in the interrogatory—"How may a sinner know his sins forgiven, and become acquainted with the fact of his adoption into the Divine family?" Few subjects present to the devout and contemplative mind, a more important field for solemn examination and scriptural research than this; and few topics are fraught with consequences more momentous, whether considered in reference to the life that now is, or the one which is to come.

The doctrine of an *assured* belief of the pardon of sin, of acceptance in Christ, and of spiritual relationship to the Most High, has been, it is well known, and yet is, regarded by many as an unscriptural and enthusiastic one. Its abettors have frequently been branded as fanatics and hypocrites, and the doctrine has been asserted to repose upon no more secure basis than that of the authority of mere visionary theorists. That, however, the direct reverse of these charges may be clearly proved from the sacred pages, is a fact of which the sincere inquirer may soon be convinced. The doctrine of assurance, it may be safely affirmed, is a doctrine of undoubted revelation, implied and expressed, and the blessing of assurance is one for the attainment of which men are earnestly exhorted to strive. St. Paul's references to this subject are frequent and distinct. In addressing the members of the Colossian Church, he declares that he had endured a "great conflict" on their behalf, "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of

the *full assurance of understanding*," Col. ii. 1, 2. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, he writes, "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the *full assurance of hope* unto the end." Heb. vi. 11. Again, in the same Epistle, he says, "Let us draw near, with a true heart, in *full assurance of faith*," Heb. x. 22. St. Peter, also, thus earnestly exhorts, "wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election SURE." 2 Pet. i. 10. The doctrine of the possibility of man's enjoying an assurance of present acceptance with God, through faith in Christ, is thus written as with a sun-beam in the sacred book, and no further proof, than the passages already cited furnish, can be required to authenticate a doctrine so fully and repeatedly presented to the attention.

The great question, however, for consideration, arises out of the inquiry as to the ORIGIN of this assurance, and the SOURCE from whence it is derived. In discussing this point, we shall naturally be led to, what has been termed, the doctrine of the "Witness

of the Spirit.” In the following pages we purpose, First, simply to state this doctrine, as it is unfolded in the Scriptures;—and, Secondly —To enter upon an examination of the principal objections which have been brought to bear against it.

On a subject so important as the one before us, it is, unquestionably, necessary that we have distinct and definite views. Next to the great doctrine of the atonement, by our Lord Jesus Christ, there is not one more intimately connected with our present peace, or with our hopes of future bliss, than that of the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sin. If this doctrine be true, we should not only receive it into our creed, but seek to have the evidence of it in our hearts. It is pre-eminently, and most emphatically, an experimental matter. The reception or rejection of this doctrine will give a tone and character to our piety, and very greatly affect our religious pleasures. It becomes us, then, to be fully convinced in our minds, as to the claims, or otherwise, of the doctrine in question, to be regarded as scriptural. To

aid in the formation of correct views on a subject so important, is the design of the present essay. The attempt may be humble, but the object is momentous.

Let us now,—casting aside prejudice, and, as far as possible, putting away pre-conceived and, it may be, even long-cherished notions,—make our appeal “to the law and to the testimony,” and “comparing spiritual things with spiritual,” endeavour to ascertain the mind and will of God : and may He who is “the Spirit of truth,” guide our inquiries and influence our conclusions !

THE DOCTRINE STATED.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God,” Rom. viii. 16. Here we have the great source and ground of assurance brought before us. In order to elucidate this passage, it will be necessary to analyze and lay open its several parts. Three particulars in this text claim our attention.

First.—The WITNESS here named.—“The

Spirit itself beareth witness." "The great business of making known to a poor sinner his acquittal in the high court of heaven, and his adoption into the king's family is, it seems, entrusted to no inferior agent. No angel is commissioned to bear the tidings ; no mortal man may disclose the secret. None but God the Holy Ghost himself." "*The Spirit itself.*" Understanding the language of Scripture in its simple and unstrained meaning, one would almost be led, without inquiry or examination, to take for granted that by the expression here employed, "the Spirit itself," is meant the Third person in the Sacred Trinity. A different opinion, however, is contended for by some, hence a few remarks in reference to this expression are requisite. The term "Spirit," it is said, does not always, in the New Testament, signify an agent or person who has an individual existence, but often a quality or disposition ; and in the passage under consideration, it is asserted, it means that "our christian temper and renewed affections are a sufficient argument to our minds that we are the children

of God.” But the context entirely refutes this interpretation. St. Paul, in the preceding verses, calls the agent of whom we now speak, “the Spirit of life ;”—“the Spirit of God ;”—“the Spirit of Christ ;”—“the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead ;”—and, according to the most judicious and learned Commentators, the passage before us should be read, “The *same* Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” The Apostle clearly distinguishes between the direct agency of the Holy Ghost and any reflex act of the soul. “The Spirit *itself* beareth witness,” not mediately by his achievements, but immediately by his own power, “that we are the children of God.” The agent is Divine, and his operation direct.

Much perplexity has been occasioned on this subject, to simple and sincere minds, by the efforts of those writers who have thus endeavoured to get rid of the immediate act of the Spirit in attesting the fact of man’s adoption, and who have sought to reduce the language of St. Paul to a mere prosopopoeia

—a figure of speech by which things or qualities are endowed with the properties of living, intelligent beings. But that no personification is here designed—whether it be of the “genius of the gospel,” as some have stated; or of the Christian’s “evangelized and sanctified tempers,” as others have asserted—is evident from the entire scope and bearing of the Apostle’s remarks. No ingenuity can make the principle of personification to apply, in the interpretation of the preceding or subsequent passages; and hence, when we are told that “the *same* Spirit” which “helpeth our infirmities” in prayer, and which “maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered,” is the Spirit who witnesses to the believer of his sonship, we naturally conclude, that by such Spirit is meant God the Holy Ghost, that Divine Agent who illumines, comforts, directs, and sanctifies all the saints of the Most High.

Second.—THAT WITH WHICH HE WITNESSES.
—“The Spirit itself beareth witness *with our spirit*.” It is a personal testimony, not borne

to others but to ourselves. There are two distinct applications of this expression. Some recognize in this text only a single witness, and read the passage as though it merely asserted that the Spirit witnesseth *to* our spirit. Others suppose that the Apostle here speaks of two distinct witnesses—the Spirit of God and our own spirit—and represents these as conjointly testifying to the fact of the believer's adoption. "The Spirit doth co-witness." This latter interpretation we take to be the true one. The language of an old writer, on this subject, is both forcible and correct:—"This witness of the Spirit cannot be meant, as some would have it, only of the Spirit's using the faculties of our minds instrumentally, as a scribe useth a pen as his instrument to attest any writing. It is true, 'that the Spirit of God doth bear witness *with* our spirits,' that is, *by* our spirits, inasmuch as our own faculties are employed in receiving and discerning the testimony of God's Spirit; but yet we must be careful that we do not confound the act of God's Spirit with the acts of our own faculties in

this testimony ; for so we should also confound the distinction of the witnesses themselves ; and we should hardly escape confounding the distinction that is between the Spirit's objective or material testimony, and its efficient and formal testimony." "The Spirit of God' and 'our own spirit,' are two distinct witnesses, and we ought always to consider them as truly and properly such. For as the Spirit of God is really and personally distinguished from our spirits ; so the act of the Spirit in witnessing is as truly distinct from the act of our own spirits. That the testimony of the Spirit of God is distinct from the testimony of our spirits is evident from the Apostle's words themselves duly considered." * There is a difference in the voices, so to speak, but harmony and agreement in the statements.

Third.—THE TESTIMONY BORNE.—“ That we are the children of God.” Not that we have been regenerated, but that we have been adopted. It is of the utmost importance

* Morning Exercises, Cripplegate ; vol. 6 : page 402 ; 5 edition. 1845.

that we bear in mind, that the Spirit witnesses not of any moral change wrought *in* us, but of an altered state or position accomplished *for* us. Children of God! Delightful fact! High and holy privilege! No longer aliens but citizens: no longer enemies but sons! Now, of this fact of man's admission into the divine family, the Holy Ghost is the principal, and, indeed, the only competent witness. The spirit of man cannot, by possibility, take cognizance of that act which is ratified and settled in the court of heaven. Man's pardon or forgiveness is an act which passes in the mind of God. How then is the saint to be assured of his acceptance? Undoubtedly, it must be through the agency of the Holy Ghost, or not at all. It is in this that he takes of the things of God, and reveals them unto men.

Here, then, in these three particulars now named, we have briefly unfolded to our view the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. Simply defined, it is A DIVINE CONVICTION OF ACCEPTANCE IN CHRIST, THROUGH THE IMMEDIATE OPERATION OF THE HOLY GHOST ON

THE HEART. Many are the portions of holy writ in which this great privilege is presented to the attention. The parallel passage to the one we have just been considering, (Gal. iv. 6,) is express and pointed—"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the SPIRIT OF HIS SON into your hearts, crying, *Abba Father.*" Again, (Eph. i. 13, 14,) "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT of promise, which is the EARNEST of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Again, (2 Cor. i. 22,) "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us is God: who hath also SEALED us, and given the EARNEST of the Spirit in our hearts."* Further, (1

* "These phrases signify the *assurance* which the Spirit of adoption does give believers of their inheritance in heaven."....."Yet though they both imply assurance, they differ thus:—SEALING especially refers to the *understanding*;—EARNEST to the *affections*. Though the Seal assures us, yet it is not part of the inheritance; but the Earnest so assures us, that it gives a part of the inheritance. It works that joy in the heart, which is a foretaste of heaven, and which the saints are filled with there."—*Cruden.*

John v. 10,) "He that BELIEVETH on the Son of God, hath the WITNESS IN HIMSELF." Other passages might be adduced bearing directly on this subject ; and to these might be added texts, almost without number, *indirectly*, yet powerfully, corroborative of the privilege of the child of God to know his sins forgiven, and to enjoy a constant assurance of his membership in the heavenly family. See Ps. lxxxix. 15 ; Isa. xii. 1, 2 ; Luke i. 77 ; Rom. viii. 15 ; 1 Cor. ii. 11, 12 ; 2 Cor. v. 1, 5 ; 1 Peter i. 8, 9 ; 1 John iii. 1, 2 ; iii. 24 ; iv. 13 ; v. 6. These passages distinctly imply the Spirit's attestation to the believer of his divine sonship.

But the doctrine of the assurance of adoption reposes not merely upon isolated texts of Scripture ; it runs like a silken thread through the whole teachings of the New Testament, and is interwoven with the entire texture of Christian experience. For example : Believers are declared to have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. v. 1.) They are said to have "the love of God shed abroad in their hearts

by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.” (Rom. v. 5.) Their bodies are said to be “Temples of the Holy Ghost.” (1 Cor. vi. 19.) They are represented as having “Christ in them, the hope of glory.” (Col. i. 27.) They are said to “*know* in whom they have believed” (2 Tim. i. 12) ; to “*know* that they have passed from death unto life” (1 John iii. 14) ; to “*know* that they are of God.” (1 John v. 19.) They “are *confident*, willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. v. 8.) They “are *persuaded* that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him.” (2 Tim. i. 12.) They have “joy and peace in believing,” (Rom. xv. 13,) and “they rejoice in hope,” (Rom. xii. 12,) “*knowing* that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” (Heb. x. 34.)

Such is the authority on which is based the important doctrine of which we speak. With respect to the precise *manner* in which the Divine Spirit communicates to man the great fact of his adoption ; *how* he operates upon the human soul, so as to assure the

saint of his sonship, we are not called upon to explain. There are various ways, probably, and various degrees of confidence by which a man may be made sensible of this important matter. A fact may be sure, though the manner in which it is accomplished may ever remain a profound and impenetrable secret. It is so here. The operations of the Holy Ghost are mysterious and inexplicable to the human intellect, though the evidence and result of his workings may be distinct and satisfactory. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." There are, however, certain marks characteristic of the Spirit's witness, which we shall now proceed to exhibit.

1. *The witness of the Spirit is internal and secret.* By this we mean that there are no outward manifestations; no audible revelations. Spirit speaks to spirit. The Holy Ghost gives its immediate testimony to the fact of man's adoption, not by any external voice or words, or by any appeal to the

bodily senses, but by a direct operation or work upon the mind. It is an inward evidence, borne by the Divine Spirit, within the secret chamber of a man's own bosom. 'The language of a late distinguished and justly celebrated Divine, sets forth this in a clear and impressive manner:—"By the testimony of the Spirit," says he, "I mean an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God ; that Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me ; that all my sins are blotted out, and that I, even I, am reconciled to God. Meantime, let it be observed, I do not mean hereby, that the Spirit of God testifies this by any outward voice ; no, nor always by an inward voice, although he may do this sometimes. Neither do I suppose that he always applies to the heart, though he often may, one or more texts of Scripture. But he so works upon the soul by his immediate influence, and by a strong, though inexplicable operation, that the stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm ; the heart resting

as in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied that God is reconciled, that all his 'iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered.' ”*

Many individuals, admitting the necessity of the distinct and direct testimony of the Holy Ghost to the fact of man's adoption, nevertheless, look for some communication from above, accompanied with external manifestations to the senses, when sin is pardoned. To these persons, it is enough to say—the sacred word affords no warrant for such an expectation. Such accompaniments were, it is true, sometimes vouchsafed under the old dispensations, and perfectly accorded with their character, inasmuch as they appealed more to the senses of men than Christianity does. But it is the peculiar glory of the New Testament economy that it is pre-eminently and emphatically spiritual—the dispensation of the Spirit. Hence to anticipate “voices” or “visions,” and to refuse comfort because the evidence of our adoption may not fully accord with our pre-conceived notions, is per-

* Wesley.—Sermon on the Witness of the Spirit.

versely to put from us the Holy Ghost, and sullenly to slight his operations. As in conviction, the Divine Spirit, generally, works upon the mind silently and secretly, directly brings home to the conscience a sense of guilt, and inwardly assures the sinner of his lost condition; so in adoption, by a like process, the believer is made acquainted with the delightful fact, that he is "a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." The Spirit, we should ever remember, beareth witness, not to our bodily senses, or through the medium of our external organs, but to "*our spirit*," that we are "the children of God."

2.—*The witness of the Spirit is direct and instantaneous;—not inductive or inferential.* By many, the evidence of a man's adoption which arises from perceiving an agreement between his feelings and conduct, and the character and experience of a believer as stated in the Scriptures, is understood to be the "witness of the Spirit." But this is evidently the witness of a man's "*own spirit*," or what St. Paul calls "the testimony of our

conscience," and should ever be carefully distinguished from that immediate and personal witness which the Holy Ghost vouchsafes upon the exercise of faith in Christ. This indirect and argumentative evidence of our relationship to God, has often, in the reasoning even of some eminent Divines, been confounded with and substituted for, that more immediate testimony of which we speak. But on the theory which thus supersedes and renders unnecessary the personal witness of the Holy Spirit, what are we to do with those passages in which he is spoken of as the "Spirit of adoption," and in which, we are told, by his inward motionings we are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father?" Unquestionably, on this theory, we claim God as our reconciled parent by virtue of our own discovery. It is the voice of our own reasoning and inference we hear, and not as the Scriptures would seem to intimate is our privilege, the voice of the Holy Spirit of God!

The language of the sacred penman, in reference to this doctrine of the direct and immediate testimony of the Holy Ghost to

the saint's adoption, is, we think, so distinct and explicit, as successfully to defy any attempts to fritter away the high and sublime privilege involved in it. "*The Spirit itself beareth witness.*" Is it possible to use words less ambiguous, or more decided? We think not. Suppose we read in any document, that on a certain occasion, the Queen *herself* opened or prorogued the parliament :—what should we understand?—That she did it by commission, or by proxy, or by any intermediate agency whatever? Most assuredly not. And can it be imagined that the Apostle would have employed the phraseology now cited, if (as some have asserted) he only meant to say, that the Spirit has given us the character of the children of God in the Bible, and that, therefore, if we compare ourselves with such character we shall be able to ascertain as to whether or not we are members of the divine family? The words, fairly considered, admit of no such construction ; and plainly imply the existence of an immediate personal testimony.

And as the witness of the Spirit is thus

direct, so also is it necessarily *instantaneous*. The doctrine of sudden conversions has, we are quite aware, often been ridiculed, not merely by men of the world, but by many laying claim to the Christian character. With very many persons, nothing is deemed genuine in religion but what is slow, dispassionate and imperceptible. We are again, and yet again, reminded that "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." That it is as "a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field ; which, indeed, is the least of all seeds ; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." The progressive character of religion is frequently and strongly insisted on. But whilst it is cheerfully conceded, that the mind is gradually prepared by a train of penitential feelings, and convictions of sin, for that state of adoption to which the Holy Spirit bears witness ; and whilst it is as readily acknowledged, that after

the act of adoption there is a "growing up into Christ, our living head in all things," it is evident that the witness itself must be granted at some given moment, and must therefore of necessity be instantaneous. A gradual witness is an absurdity. He who bears testimony to a fact, does it at some particular period, and he who knows that fact obtained his knowledge at some precise time. Hence, if the doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit be allowed, it seems to follow as a self-evident consequence, that that of the suddenness of his testimony in pardon must be allowed also.

3.—*The witness of the Spirit is complete and satisfactory.* It excludes doubt concerning the subject of its attestation. As one has justly remarked,—“It has not the imperfection of proceeding from partial and obscure to complete persuasion, by a graduated process. It persuades, it assures at once. The attestation may certainly be more or less vivid, but it is distinct in all cases, though the confidence produced by its presence admits of gracious and abundant augmentation.

as the mind increases in strength and purity, and as faith becomes more bold and vigorous in its exercise." It is a question often proposed,—How may we know that it is really and truly the Spirit that witnesses with our spirit? By these two marks. First,—By that special distinguishing light that ever accompanies the testimony of the Holy Ghost, and which manifests itself in such a degree, as to overbear all doubts and disputes both about our spiritual state and about the testimony itself; just as the light of the sun not only discovers other things and reveals them; but also displays itself by its self-evidencing power to the conviction of every beholder.* Secondly,—By the harmony and agreement that ever

* "Sincere persons are oft-times afraid of confounding the mere operation, or the presumptuous conclusions of their own minds with this divine testimony; and inquire, with all the solicitude which the great importance of the subject demands, for some rule by which their judgment may be directed. They require a rule devoid of the perplexities of metaphysical speculation, and embodying principles on which the docile mind can with confidence rely. Now, mere mental acts are ordinarily produced, or extensively affected by the senses; but the adoption of the believer belongs to a class of facts existing beyond the sphere of sense, and the witness connected with it is clearly distinguishable from any mere act of the mind. The understanding,

exist between the testimony of the Spirit of God and our own spirit ; precisely as we know the testimony of our conscience to be correct by its agreement with the written word. A believer's assurance of acceptance with God is always confirmed by the concurring testimony of these three ;—the Spirit,—the Word,—and Conscience,—all testifying one and the same thing. Possessed of this united witness, believers are enabled triumphantly to exclaim, "Now are we the sons of God."*

in its enlightened converse with the truths of the gospel, enlarges its knowledge ; grasps the great arguments which encourage faith in Christ ; and, by repeated exercise, under the divine blessing, becomes acquainted with the provisions and arrangements of God's mercy in the salvation of sinners. But the sinner's mind, in all its efforts, stops short of assuring itself of individual participation in the benefits of redemption, amid all the discovered manifestations of God's abundant love to mankind, until, upon the exercise of faith in him who justifieth the ungodly, it is persuaded, not by its own reasoning, but by the Holy Spirit, of its own interest in the paternal love of God. The impression is made upon the mind from without, by a foreign—by a Divine agent ; and however temptation, acting upon the timidity, and humble and anxious sincerity of its subject, may weaken the evidence of its divinity, or cause it to be disregarded to the aggravation of inquietude, it is, at the time of its bestowment, sufficiently distinct from any mere operation of the mind, as to be readily recognized and relied upon with confidence and comfort."—*Prest's Sermon "On the Witness of the Spirit."*

* Morning Exercises.

The objection which has sometimes been made to the completeness of the Spirit's witness, arising out of the fact that it requires corroboration, so to speak, by the witness of our own spirit, is more plausible than powerful, and more popular than convincing. A witness may be perfectly credible, and his testimony may be distinctly borne, and yet further and even indirect evidence may greatly augment the confidence previously felt in such witness. It is just so in the case before us. The Holy Ghost testifies to the fact of man's adoption ; of this fact he is the only competent witness, inasmuch as he only is cognizant of what passes in the mind of the invisible God ;—but directly accompanying and immediately following this inward assurance are his moral operations, making us “new creatures” in Christ Jesus ; and in these moral operations, we have the proof that we are in no delusion as to the character of him who testifies that we are passed from death unto life. The *direct* witness of the Spirit is guarded and strengthened by the *indirect* witness of our own spirit, as to the change

wrought in us ; and yet without the former testimony, the latter would never remove darkness and doubt as to the great fact of our relationship to God. Both combined, however, banish hesitation from the mind, and the saint humbly, yet confidently, reposes in a sense of sins forgiven.

4.—*The witness of the Spirit is constant and abiding.* It is not a blessing conferred upon the believer upon his first exercise of faith in Christ, and then withdrawn, subsequently to be only occasionally vouchsafed, to cheer in seasons of special sorrow, or to strengthen in hours of peculiar difficulty, but it is designed to abide for the continual joy of the soul. The Holy Ghost, as sustaining the office of "Comforter," is promised to each individual member of the church, and most explicitly has the Saviour declared, "He shall abide with you for ever." There is no need's-be for those fluctuations of experience, and those seasons of spiritual darkness, which make up so large a portion of the religious history of many of God's people. There is nothing in the character of God, or in his usual mode

of dealing with men, to prevent our enjoying uninterruptedly the witness of his paternal regard. "The Spirit itself beareth," that is, continues to bear, "witness" (now witnesseth) "with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The immediate testimony of the Holy Ghost, as to the fact of the saint's adoption, is not, as Archbishop Leighton calls it, a mere "arbitrary beam that God reserves in his own hand;" "a piece of heaven in the soul, with which he sometimes cheers it withal,"—but it may be constantly enjoyed. The Spirit, in his character of "witness," is given, not "as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night,"—a mere occasional visitant,—but as a constant guest. It is true that the imperfect experience of many, and the recollection of our own frequently suspended consolations, may, indeed, in reference to this matter, serve to humble us before God; yet, nevertheless, the privilege of the constant indwelling of the Holy Ghost is set before us as the common right of believers; and cherishing holy affections, and fostering

holy desires, we may ever be cheered by a divine voice within, responding to the testimony of our own consciences, that our "names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

But here it may be necessary to guard against a very prevalent error. There is a class of persons who hold that the assurance of our present acceptance and sonship is invariably connected with an assurance of our final perseverance, and of our eventual attainment of heaven. But it by no means follows, that because the one is enjoyed the other also may be possessed. An indefeasible right to heaven is no where, in the sacred volume, spoken of as a necessary accompaniment of the witness of the Spirit. It is possible to "make shipwreck of faith;" "to cast away our confidence which hath great recompense of reward;" to cease to be "living branches" in the living vine; and hence, though once possessed of the love of God, to forfeit union with the Saviour, and, as the consequence, be cast forth as a "branch that is withered," and finally be burned. The believer, therefore, is earnestly exhorted to

guard against "grieving the Holy Spirit, by which he is sealed unto the day of redemption." The significant warning is given unto him,—reminding him both of the possibility of falling from grace and of retaining it,—“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

We have thus endeavoured to furnish a brief view of the work of the Spirit in witnessing to man the great fact of his adoption into the divine family. Of the importance of the doctrine now introduced to the attention, we have already said, it is scarcely possible to speak too highly. It is intimately connected with the believer's comfort, and is, we think, essential to his continued peace and joy. Without the witness of the Spirit on what are we to rest the happiness and the trust of children? We know, indeed, that many who deny the direct witness of the Spirit, assert that they provide for the comfort of believers in a way equally safe and effectual. But it may be well to ask the question, is the way equally scriptural?

Is this doctrine of God, or is it not? If so, then should we beware how we lower the standard of christian experience and attainment. If not, it well becomes us to tremble lest we be found teaching as heavenly truths the mere dogmas of men. The testimony of inspiration, however, seems to be most explicit,—“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

But we greatly doubt the truth of the assertion, that independent of and apart from the witness of the Spirit, any thing like a firm basis is furnished for human happiness and joy. There may be hope,—conjecture may ever and anon throw a gleam of light across the path,—but that “full assurance of faith,” that pleasing certainty of acceptance with God, which is absolutely requisite to sustain the mind in seasons of fierce temptation and in hours of fiery trial, cannot be enjoyed. From whence is it to spring? REPENTANCE cannot furnish evidence of pardon, for that supposes that the penitent is still the subject of condemnation.

FAITH affords no proof of adoption, for, as it has been justly remarked, "faith, both as assent and confidence, has every possible degree; it is capable of admixture with doubt, and with self-dependance; nor without some definite and particular characters being assigned to justifying faith, could we ever, with any confidence, conclude it as our own."

OBEDIENCE cannot be exhibited as the infallible test of our sonship, for who does not know that *that*, as displayed even in the life of the most mature believer, is necessarily imperfect. "'LOVE, JOY, PEACE,' these 'fruits of the Spirit,' cannot themselves manifest pardon, for they cannot exist till it is manifested. They pre-suppose pardon, but then they as clearly pre-suppose that that pardon has been made known. For, if we 'love God,' it is because we know him as God reconciled; if we have 'joy in God,' it is because we have received the reconciliation; if we have 'peace,' it is because 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' God, conceived of as angry, cannot be the object of

filial love ; pardon unfelt supposes guilt and fear still to burden the mind ; and guilt and 'joy and peace,' cannot co-exist. But by the argument of those who make these the *media* of ascertaining the fact of our forgiveness and adoption, we must be supposed to love God, whilst yet we feel him to be angry with us ; to rejoice and have peace, whilst the fearful apprehensions of the consequences of unremitted sin are not removed ; and if this is impossible, then the ground of our 'love,' and 'joy,' and 'peace,' is pardon revealed and witnessed, directly and immediately, by the Spirit of adoption.'**

The necessity, then, of the direct witness of the Spirit, in order to the enjoyment of that "full assurance" of "faith" and "hope," of which St. Paul speaks, we take to be evident. Without this there must frequently be, in the sincere soul, secret misgiving, perplexing doubts, foreboding fears, and a whole train of evils, utterly inconsistent with that "peace of God" which is the un-

* Watson's "Theo. Inst." vol. 2 ; page 265.

doubted privilege of all believers.* It is cheerfully conceded, that many may have enjoyed this blessing, who have not called it by this name ; but it is, at all times, important that we distinguish evangelical blessings by evangelical titles ; otherwise we are in danger, first, of confounding things which differ, and then, of overlooking or neglecting most important and fundamental points, both of experience and practice.

How to attain unto the possession of the

* It might also with propriety have been stated, that *sincerity*, in the discharge of our religious duties, is no evidence of acceptance with God, nor is it capable of producing permanent peace. Conscious integrity is not necessarily connected with assurance. "What are you afraid of Doctor ?" said a Lady to our great Lexicographer. "Madam," he replied, "I am afraid of going to hell." "Well but, Doctor," the Lady answered, "do you not know that God is merciful ?" "Yes, madam," said he, "I know he is ; but God has told me that he will place some on the right hand and some on the left ; and I do not know but he will place *me* on the left hand." Dr. Johnson was unquestionably sincere, both in his search after truth and in his attention to his various duties, when he gave utterance to this language ; but destitute of the "Witness of the Spirit," and possessed of that conscience which makes "cowards of us all," the great Leviathan of literature trembled at the prospect of having to stand before the tribunal of his Maker.—*Boswell's "Life of Johnson."*

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exalted privilege of which we now speak, is a point of the utmost importance, and one deserving the most serious attention of every reflecting mind. Like every other blessing of the New Testament Covenant it is a purchased one, and must, therefore, be received in the way in which all other blessings are bestowed, and by a compliance with the condition on which all gospel benefits are suspended. The Apostle James has given the seeker of assurance a simple but comprehensive injunction, by attention to which he will soon be put into possession of this "pearl of great price:"—"Let him ask in faith." There must be PRAYER; for he who asketh not receiveth not: but there must be BELIEVING PRAYER; for he who doubteth dishonoureth God, and, "let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." That the blessing of an assured sense of the forgiveness of sin and adoption into the family of God, follows upon the exercise of faith, is stated with great distinctness by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "*In whom, after that ye believed, ye*

were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Faith is the sole condition of our adoption ; for thus it is written, " As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," John i. 12. " Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ," Gal. iii. 26. We are not adopted into the divine family because of any thing meritorious, excellent, or prepossessing in ourselves ; but exclusively on the ground of *faith*. This is the principle which honours God as the law-giver ; recognises the law as " holy, just, and true ;" acknowledges the fact of its violation ; and reposes upon the atonement of Christ as having satisfied its claims. Hence we are " justified by faith ;" and by faith are made members of God's spiritual family, and entitled to the blessings of God's adopted sons.

But here the great question naturally occurs—What is faith, saving faith, the faith that justifies ? This is a point that frequently bewilders the simple seeker of salvation, and, as some have defined faith, it is

enough to perplex the most thoughtful and mature. But faith, as brought before us in the Scriptures, is not that abstruse thing which many have represented it to be. It is a simple trust in Christ ; a full recumbency of the soul upon, and an appropriation of, the merits of Christ. "It is," as one has forcibly expressed it, "such a belief of the Gospel, by the power of the Spirit of God, as leads us to come to Christ, to receive Christ, to trust in Christ, and to commit the keeping of our souls into his hands, in humble confidence of his ability and his willingness to save us."* Whenever an individual thus reposes upon Christ, whenever he thus ventures his all upon a Saviour's merits, he is accepted and saved ; and from henceforth he can sing, "O Lord,

* "The Acts or Exercises of Faith seem to be three ; or rather, that faith, which is required in order to our Justification, is a complex act of the mind, which includes three distinct but concurrent exertions of its powers. It includes,

(1.) "*The Assent of the Understanding to the truth of the testimony of God in the Gospel ; and especially to that part of it, which concerns the design and efficacy of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin.*

(2.) "*The Consent of the Will and Affections to this plan of*

I will praise Thee, for though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and now Thou dost comfort me." Relying upon the Redeemer, there is granted, in the way of *gracious consequence*, and as the immediate *result* of this act of personal trust in Christ, the evidence of acceptance, and such persons so "believing," have the inward witness that they are "children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."*

salvation; such an approbation and choice of it, as imply a renunciation of every other refuge, and a steady and decided adherence to this. Unbelief is called a 'disallowing' of the foundation laid in Zion; whereas faith includes a hearty *allowance* of it, and a thankful acquiescence in God's revealed method of forgiveness.

(3.) "From this assent of the enlightened understanding, and consent of the rectified will, to the evangelical testimony concerning Christ crucified, results the third thing which I suppose to be implied in justifying faith; namely, *Actual Trust in the Saviour, and Personal Apprehension of his merits*. When, under the promised leading and influence of the Holy Ghost, the penitent sinner thus confidently relies and individually lays hold on Christ, then the work of justifying faith is complete; then and not till then he is immediately justified."—*Bunting's Sermon on Justification by Faith*.

* "The *interval* between our full and unreserved accept-

“Children of God!” How exalted the relationship! “Heirs of God!” How unspeakably glorious the privilege! Oh! what inexpressible sweetness does this consciousness of the divine favour produce in the mind! What heavenly calmness—what holy tranquility—breathes within, even when the storms of life are howling without! How far surpassing earthly distinctions—how infinitely superior to mere human relationships, is the honour arising out of this connection with the Most High! What are all family claims; what is alliance with the most ancient and noble blood among the sons of men, compared with the lofty dignity, the high privilege of being children of God! Let the men of the world boast, if they please, of their pedigree; let them pride themselves on their heraldic distinctions; let them trace back their descent, if they will, to the most ancient and renowned

ance of Christ, and the Spirit's comfortable witness that God for Christ's sake now accepts of us, is ordinarily so small, as to be scarcely the subject of our own perception or observation at the time.”—*Bunting on Justification.*

of all the families of earth : be it the Christian's glory that he is of heavenly birth ; that God is his father ; and that by this exercise of faith in Christ, he is enabled to lay claim to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." This consciousness is, indeed, calculated to impart satisfaction amid the trials of life ; this assurance will support when about to cross "the swellings of Jordan ;" and when earthly scenes shall have receded from the vision, and the curtain shall have fallen on all below, this inward testimony of acceptance with God, will form the saint's sure passport into those regions where is "fulness of joy ; at His right hand, where are pleasures for evermore."

CHAPTER II

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

THE doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit, as stated in the preceding pages, has, like most other doctrines of revelation, been the subject of considerable dispute and controversy. We purpose, in the present chapter, to examine, in order, the principal objections which have been urged against it, and we doubt not, that a review of the arguments usually brought to oppose this doctrine, will have a tendency rather to strengthen our conviction of its Scriptural character.

Objection I.—The direct witness of the Spirit to the consciences of men, and a consequent assurance arising out of that witness

that they are the children of God, is altogether IMPOSSIBLE to be attained in the present life.

This is an assertion often made. That, however, this objection may be satisfactorily met, both by reason and Scripture, we have not the slightest doubt. The witness of the Spirit is here said to be impossible. But surely, the opponents of this doctrine do not mean by this, that it is *naturally* impossible? In other words, that it is not within the range of divine power? Is it not possible that He who made the mouth, who hath given us this wonderful faculty of conveying our thoughts and communicating our ideas to each other,—is it not possible that He should converse with his rational creatures, and by sensible manifestations, or by inward impressions, convey to their minds the knowledge of a fact which lies beyond the ken of their natural faculties, but which, nevertheless, is highly conducive to their interest and happiness? To own a God and to deny him such a power would be monstrous indeed. That spirits can express

themselves to spirits without words, is evident from the acknowledged converse that subsists between angelic beings—the power which both good and evil spirits have of acting upon and suggesting thoughts to the human mind,—and also, from what the Scriptures assert concerning mental or unuttered prayer. If then, created spirits can express themselves to spirits without words, or without the aid of any external symbols, how much more may not the Eternal Spirit, secretly and inwardly, reveal his mind and will to man? He who created the faculties of man's mind, can put them into act and exercise how and as he pleases; and He who knows our thoughts before we have conceived them, can unquestionably in ten thousand ways unknown to us influence those thoughts, and make them the medium of important and satisfactory intelligence to our spirits.

The direct witness of the spirit is said to be impossible. But is it meant by this that it is *morally* impossible,—that it is contrary to God's ordinary manner of working, or inconsistent with the general bearings and

design of the christian scheme? Is it not as possible for the Spirit to bear witness to the fact of man's adoption, as for him to bear witness to man's sin and guilt? Yet where is the individual who has not had "the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit," as to the great fact that in a state of nature he is an alien from God and exposed to hell? It is the peculiar office and work of the Spirit to "convince of sin." And every believer will readily call to mind the difference between that mere intellectual persuasion of his sinful state which he once had,—a persuasion unaccompanied by proper emotions and unproductive of practical results,—and that deep and spiritual conviction wrought in him by the Holy Ghost, and through which he was brought as a trembling penitent to the foot of the cross. Now, our argument is this:—If it is possible for the Holy Spirit to "convince of sin," it is equally possible for him to attest our pardon. If without his direct and immediate operations we can never be brought to evangelical contrition, so without his direct and immediate witness,

we can never enjoy an assurance of our sonship. The work of the Spirit *in both cases is precisely the same*, the matter and substance of the testimony only being of a different character. In the one case, the Spirit testifies to a man that God is angry with him; in the other, that "His anger is turned away," and that now he loveth him.

Objection II.—The doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit must necessarily be false, inasmuch as it is a *novel* one, devoid of the sanctions of ecclesiastical antiquity, and a mere peculiarity of a modern sect.

If this assertion could be established, it would greatly militate against any further evidence we might advance in favour of this doctrine, for, beyond dispute, what is new in theology is false. But this doctrine, we contend, is as old as the Bible, and the privilege it unfolds has been enjoyed by saints in every age of the church. Of Abel, it is said, that he "obtained witness that he was righteous." Of Enoch, "that he had this testimony that he pleased God." Job could say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that in my

flesh I shall see God." David rejoiced in the assurance, that God had forgiven him "all his iniquities." Isaiah, in the temple, obtained knowledge that his iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged. Hezekiah testified, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." The New Testament saints, also, express themselves with equal clearness and force as to their personal knowledge of sins forgiven. Peter, Paul, James, and John, in effect join in the same testimony,—“We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins.” The assertion, then, respecting the novelty of this doctrine, is not only utterly unsupported by proof, but is directly opposed to evidence which the Scriptures themselves afford.

But passing by the evidence furnished in favour of this doctrine by the testimony of Scripture, and the experience of believers in remote antiquity, and placing the objection on the ground on which it is usually based,—we remark, that the Reformers, the Fathers and early Dignitaries of the English Church, and many of the Puritan and Nonconformist

Divines, strongly held and zealously taught the doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit.* We are, indeed, in reference to this matter, "encompassed about with a

* It would be easy to multiply authorities in favour of the doctrine of the Direct Witness of the Spirit. The following are selected from a host of testimonies, evidently proving that from the early dawn of the Reformation, to the present time, there has been a succession of apostolical teaching on this subject.

LUTHER says,—“Let us assure ourselves that God sendeth the Holy Ghost into our hearts. This I say to confute that pernicious doctrine of the Papists, which taught that no man certainly knows whether he be in the favour of God or no ; whereby they utterly defaced the doctrine of faith, tormented men’s consciences, banished Christ quite out of the Church, and darkened and denied all the benefits of the Holy Ghost. But we must be assured that we are under grace, that we please God for Christ’s sake, and that we have the Holy Ghost. Rom. viii. 9. Christ first maketh us righteous, by the knowledge of himself in his holy gospel, and afterwards he createth a new heart in us, bringing forth good motions, and giveth unto us that assurance, whereby we are persuaded that we please the Father for his sake.”—*Commentary on Gal.* iv. 6.

CALVIN.—“If the Holy Ghost did not bear testimony of God’s paternal love, our tongue would remain silent, for we could not in prayer call him Father, unless we were assured that he was really so.”

The HOMILIES of the Church of England, speak on this wise :—“All these fathers, martyrs, and other holy men, whom St. Paul spake of, had their faith surely fixed in

great cloud of witnesses." In every age of the church God has had a people who have borne distinct testimony to this great truth, and who have known what this secret of the

God, when all the world was against them. They did not only know God to be the Lord, Maker, and Governor of all men in the world, but also they had a *special confidence and trust*, that he was, and would be their God, their Comforter, Aider, Helper, Maintainer, and Defender. This is the Christian Faith which these holy men had, and we also ought to have. And although they were not named christian men, yet it was a christian faith that they had ; for they looked for all benefits of God the Father, through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, as we now do. This difference is between them and us, that they looked when Christ should come, and we be in the time when he is come. Therefore, saith Augustine, the time is altered and changed, but not the faith. For we have both one faith in one Christ. The same Holy Ghost also, that we have, had they, saith St. Paul. *For as the Holy Ghost doth teach us to trust in God and to call upon Him as our Father*, so did he teach them to say, as it is written, Thou Lord, art our Father and Redeemer, and thy name is without beginning and everlasting. God gave them grace to be his children, as he doth us now. But now, by the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ, *we have received more abundantly the Spirit of God in our hearts, whereby we may conceive a greater faith, and a surer trust, than many of them had.*—*Homily on Faith.*

"We have full surety of our hope, that we shall have our bodies likewise raised again from death, to have them glorified in immortality, and joined to his glorious body ; *having in the meanwhile his Holy Spirit within our hearts, as a SEAL*

Lord is. Hence the objection to the explication of the doctrine now given, asserting it to be an unsupported novelty, entirely fails, and the fact is made manifest, that

and PLEDGE of our everlasting inheritance."—*Homily on the Resurrection.*

"If after contrition we feel our consciences at peace with God through remission of our sin, and so be reconciled again to his favour, and hope to be his children, and inheritors of everlasting life,—all is of God."—*Homily for Rogation Week.*

RICHARD HOOKER. (A.D. 1590.)—"The Spirit which God hath given to us, to assure us that we are the sons of God, to embolden us to call upon him as our Father."—*Sermon on the Certainty of Faith.*

"But unto you, 'because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts,' to the end that ye might know that Christ hath built you upon a rock immoveable ; that He hath registered your names in the book of life ; that he hath bound himself in a sure and everlasting covenant to be your God."—*Sermon on Jude.*

BISHOP JEWELL. (A.D. 1609.)—"This Spirit showeth us the mercy of God, helpeth us to pray, and prayeth for us, is our comforter, helpeth our infirmities, and maketh us know the things that are given us of God. This Spirit comforteth us in all our temptations, and beareth witness with our spirit that we be the children of God, that God hath chosen us, and doth love us ; and hath prepared us to salvation ; that we are the heirs of his glory."—*Exposition 2 Thessalonians.*

BISHOP ABBOTT. (A.D. 1615.)—"When, therefore, God doth send his Spirit into our hearts, crying, and

opposition on this ground proceeds rather from uninformed temerity than from patient investigation. Thousands of the holiest of our race, if this doctrine be not true, must

making us to cry, 'Abba Father,' the same is a witness to our spirit that we are the sons of God : because for no other reason, doth God send forth this Spirit into our hearts, but because we are sons. When God giveth to us this light and feeling that he is our Father, there followeth necessarily a certificate that we are his children, because these, as relatives, mutually depend one upon another. For neither the spirit of man himself, nor any other spirit, can give him that spiritual eye of the inner man, whereby to look upon God as a Father ; that sincere, and single, and pure affection, and invocation, wherewith the faithful soul tendereth itself unto God, but only the Spirit of God himself. It is no way incident unto us to have in heart and conscience that familiar and lovely access unto the throne of grace, but upon conscience of the Spirit dwelling in us."

BISHOP ANDREWS. (A.D. 1618.)—" It is the proper effect of the blood of Christ to cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God : which if we find it doth, Christ is come to us as he is to come ; and the Spirit is come, and puts his *teste* (witness). And if we have his *teste*, we may go our way in peace. Even so come, Lord Jesus, and come, O blessed Spirit, and bear witness to our spirit that Christ's water and his blood, we have our part in both ; both in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and in the blood of the New Testament, the legacy whereof is everlasting life in thy kingdom of glory."—*Sermon on Sending the Holy Ghost.*

be branded as false witnesses for God, inasmuch as they have professed to receive it, not only because they have found it written in the Bible, but also because they have enjoyed the evidence of it in their hearts.

BISHOP DAVENANT. (A.D. 1629.)—"The Holy Spirit specially seals each particular believer, and makes him sure of his adoption, by a certain wonderful and secret testimony ; for he is given to every believer as a pledge of divine love ; and he finally pronounces in the hearts of the godly, that they are in favour with God, and that their sins are remitted them. The authorities from which all this is proved, are well known (Rom. viii. 16. Gal. iv. 6. Eph. i. 13.) Nor is this testimony fallacious or conjectural, but certain and infallible in all in whom it is found. For the word is 'the ministration of the Spirit,' and faith conceived by the ministration of the word is always joined by the witness of the Spirit itself, which is a particular testimony in the heart of a particular man that he is in grace and that he is a child of God."—*On Colossians (Allport's Translation), vol. 1, page 89.*

BISHOP REYNOLDS. (A.D. 1632.)—"Being persuaded of God's love to us, the heart is framed to love him again ; for who can be persuaded of so great a benefit as the remission of sins, and not love Him by whom they are remitted."—*Exposition of Psalm cx., page 324.*

ARCHBISHOP USHER. (A.D. 1650.)—"From adoption flows all Christians' joy ; for the Spirit of adoption is, first, a witness, (Rom. viii. 16) ; second, a seal, (Eph. iv. 30) ; third, the pledge and earnest of our in-

Objection III.—The doctrine of the direct witness of the Spirit is one which has respect unto his *extraordinary* operations exclusively, and discloses a privilege which was confined to apostolic times, or is only enjoyed

heritance, (Eph. i. 14); setting a holy security on the soul, whereby it rejoiceth, even in affliction, in hope of glory.”—*Sum and Substance of Christian Religion*.

BISHOP PEARSON. (A.D. 1660.)—“It is the office of the Holy Ghost to assure us of the adoption of sons, to create in us a sense of the paternal love of God towards us, to give us an earnest of our everlasting inheritance. ‘The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.’ ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.’ And, ‘because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.’ ‘For we have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.’ As, therefore, we are born again by the Spirit, and receive from him our regeneration, so we are also assured by the same Spirit of our adoption; and because being sons, we are also heirs, ‘heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ,’ by the same Spirit, we have the pledge, or rather the earnest of our inheritance. ‘For he which stablisheth us in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us, and hath given the earnest of his Spirit in our hearts;’ so that we are ‘sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our

in the present day by a few individuals pre-eminent for piety and matured in devotion.

This is one of the most common and popular objections to the doctrine of which we

inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.'"—*Exposition of the Creed.*

BISHOP BROWNRIGG. (A.D. 1665)—"This is one great office of the Holy Ghost, to ratify and seal up to us the forgiveness of our sins. 'In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.'—*Sermon on Whitsunday.*

ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON. (A.D. 1670)—"In believing this forgiveness of sins, and so the other privileges that attend it, there be these three things gradually leading one to the other. 1. To believe that there is such a thing and that it is purchased by the death of Christ, and so attainable by coming unto him for it. 2. By the soul, finding itself ready to sink under the burden of its own sins, is persuaded to go to him, and lay over that load on him, and itself withal resolves to rest on him for this forgiveness: this is to believe on him who is the Lord our Righteousness. 3. Upon this believing on him for forgiveness, follows a reflex believing of that forgiveness; not continually and inseparably, especially if we take the degree of assurance somewhat high, but yet in itself, it is apt to follow, and often in God's gracious dispensation doth follow upon that former act of believing, through the clearness and strength of faith in the soul, and sometimes withal is backed with an EXPRESS, PECULIAR TESTIMONY OF GOD'S OWN SPIRIT. To believe, and to grow stronger in believing, and to aspire to the assurance of faith, is our constant duty.".....

now speak. But it may be enough to ask, in reference to this particular objection,—Where is it thus written in the Book? On what data does this assertion rest? Where

“It is such a gift as we may not only lawfully seek, but do foolishly prejudice ourselves and slight it, if we neglect to seek it, and want so rich a blessing for want of asking, and withal, labouring to keep our hearts in a due dispose and frame for entertaining it. The keeping our consciences pure, as much as may be, doth not only keep the comfortable evidence of pardon clearest and least interrupted within us, but is the likeliest to receive those pure joys that flow immediately into the soul from the Spirit of God.”—*Exposition of the Creed.*

DR. ISAAC BARROW. (A.D. 1669.)—“This is that Spirit which constituteth us the sons of God, qualifying us to be so by dispositions resembling God, and filial affections towards him: certifying us that we are so, and causing us by a free instinct to cry ‘Abba, Father,’ running into his bosom of love, and flying under the wings of his mercy in all our needs and distresses. Whence, ‘as many as are led by the Spirit,’ (saith St. Paul) ‘they are the sons of God;’ and ‘The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God.’”—*Sermon on the Gift of the Holy Ghost.*

BISHOP HOPKINS. (A.D. 1680.)—“When the soul is prepared for the work of grace by the work of conviction, when it is prepared for comfort by the work of humiliation, the same Spirit, that was before a spirit of bondage, becomes now a Spirit of adoption. That is, the Holy Ghost

are the passages to be found in which this witness is classed among the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, or limited to the early days of Christianity? Unquestionably, it is

persuades and assures us of the love and favor of God, and enables us, through divine light beaming in upon our consciences, to behold him as a gracious and reconciled Father, whom before we trembled at as a stern and terrible Judge. The same wind that, in a raging storm, tosseth the sea to and fro in restless heaps, in a calm doth only gently move and fan it with pleasing purples. So it is here. The Spirit of God, that in conviction raiseth a tempest in the conscience, afterwards breathes forth a sweet calm of peace and comfort upon it; the Spirit that was before 'a Spirit of bondage,' when the soul is sufficiently thereby prepared for grace, becomes a 'Spirit of adoption.' This is that Spirit of adoption that is here spoken of; and it is called so, because it witnesseth with our spirits that we are the children of God by adoption. God hath but one Son by eternal generation, and that is Jesus Christ; called therefore, 'the only begotten of the Father,' (1 John i. 14.) He hath many sons by creation, even all mankind; so Adam is called 'the son of God,' (Luke iii. 38.) He hath many sons also by adoption, even all that are effectually called according to the purpose of his grace; all that are sanctified; who are of strangers made 'heirs of God, and co-heirs with Jesus Christ' himself, who is the natural Son of God, (as it is Rom. viii. 17.) Now, because it is the work of the Holy Ghost to testify to us this our great privilege that we are enrolled in the family of heaven, and become the children of God, therefore he is called the 'Spirit of adoption;' that is, the Spirit that witnesses to us our adoption."—*Sermon on the Assurance of Heaven and Salvation.*

not too much to demand that, at least, one solitary scripture be adduced in support of a theory bearing on a matter so important and momentous. Nowhere, however, in the sa-

ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON. (A.D. 1690).—"By the same Spirit we are said to be made partakers of that great and glorious privilege of adoption, and are advanced to that high honour and dignity of being called the sons of God, Rom. viii. 14. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God,' and consequently heirs of a blessed resurrection to eternal life. For so the Apostle reasons,—verse 16, 17,—'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit,'—that is,—*is a testimony within us*, 'that we are the children of God. 'And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.' So that the Holy Spirit of God, which is conferred on all sincere Christians, and does reside in them, is a mark or seal of their being the children of God, and a pledge or earnest of the blessed inheritance of eternal life, as the Scripture very plainly and frequently declares."—*Sermons*, vol. 10, page 382.

ARCHBISHOP WAKE. (A.D. 1693).—"Let us be perfect and of one mind : and the God of peace will be with us, and give us that peace and comfort within, which the iniquity of men may chance to deny us without. If to be secure of heaven and the glories of it ; if to anticipate our final sentence, and to know we shall be justified and saved, when we come to die,—a felicity greater than which no Christian can desire now, or hope hereafter ; this we shall not fail of, if we follow the Apostle's declaration,—'Let us be perfect, be of one mind,' &c. To this blessed assurance, also, the Spirit of God shall bear witness with

cred volume, is it intimated that some only of believers shall be thus highly favoured. In the mere absence, then, of all authority from the pages of inspiration, limiting this

our spirits that we are the sons of God."—*Sermons*, vol. 1, page 125.

ARCHBISHOP SECKER. (A.D. 1730.)—"By the Holy Ghost also, 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts,' teaching us to look upon him, not as an austere master, but a kind parent; or in the language of St. Paul, to cry, 'Abba Father.' And thus, 'the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit,'—*joins with our Consciences to complete the evidence that we are the sons of God*; from whence arises that joy in the Holy Ghost, which different persons have in very different degrees, and therefore no one should despond, because he feels but little, or at times, perhaps, nothing of it, provided he truly honours and serves God. But to some persons, on some occasions, the heavenly Comforter vouchsafes, both strong assurances of their good state; ('hereby know we that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us;') and such lively consolations from it, as amount to a pledge and foretaste of happiness to come. Accordingly they are said to be 'sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of their inheritance.'"—*Lectures on the Creed*.

From PURITAN and NON-CONFORMIST writers we might draw largely in support of the important doctrine of which we are now speaking. The following testimonies are given, as furnishing examples of the teaching of some of the greatest Divines the world has ever produced, in refer-

blessing to some select and favoured parties, we have strong presumptive evidence of the unscriptural character of the objection urged.

That the witness of the Spirit is the com-

ence to the Doctrine of the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, by the direct and immediate witness of the Holy Ghost.

SCUDDER. (A.D. 1620.)—"A man may have GOOD ASSURANCE that he is a child of God."

"And be we sure to confess, and ask forgiveness of this debt (sin) and never give over until it hath pleased God to seal an acquittance unto our Consciences by his Spirit, which he will give to all that ask it."—*On the Lord's Prayer, (Key of Heaven) page 66,—365.*

PERKINS. (A.D. 1626.)—(Rom. viii. 16.) "In these words are two testimonies of our adoption set down: the first is, the Spirit of God dwelling in us, and testifying unto us, that we are God's children. The Holy Ghost gives testimony by applying the promise of remission of sins, and life everlasting by Christ, to the heart. The second testimony of our adoption is our spirit, that is, our Conscience sanctified and renewed by the Holy Ghost."—*Works, vol. 2, page 18, 19. See also Works, vol. 1, page 564.*

PRESTON. (A.D. 1630.)—"The witness of the Spirit is a thing that we cannot express: it is a certain divine expression of light, a certain unexpressible assurance that we are the sons of God, a certain secret manifestation that God hath received us, and put away our sins, no man knows it, but they that have it. I confess, it is a wondrous thing, and if there were not some Christians that did feel it, and know it, you might believe there were no

mon privilege of believers, and not restricted to any particular individuals, is evident from the very genius of Christianity, which is alike and to the same extent "glad tidings

such thing, that it were but fancy and enthusiasm ; but it is certain that there are a generation of men who know what this seal of the Lord is."—*"The New Covenant,"* page 400.

BYFIELD. (A.D. 1637.)—"We should strive to get evidence of our Salvation. Heaven should suffer violence ; seeing it may be had, we should never be quiet till we get it."

"The adopted have the witness within them to testify that they are the sons of God, as the seal and earnest of their inheritance."—*On Peter, folio, page 77, —646.*

THOMAS GOODWIN. (A.D. 1653.)—"And this Spirit is still in our preaching, and in your hearts, and persuades you of Christ's very love to this day."—*"The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners upon Earth,"* page 43.

SIMON FORD. (A.D. 1655.)—"The testimony of the Spirit is immediate, by his secret influence upon the heart, quieting and calming all distrust and diffidence concerning its condition, by his own immediate power. Fear is banished by a soft whisper from the Spirit of God in the heart ; and this in such a way, that though the spirit of a man is immediately calmed by it, yet it cannot tell how it comes to pass."—*On "Adoption:"* page 217.

CARYL. (A.D. 1660.)—"The Spirit gives a distinct witness of his own, which is his immediate work ; and is

of great joy to all men." Nor is there any thing in the mind or circumstances of one, favourable to the enjoyment of this blessing, that marks not equally the condition of

in a way of peculiarity and transcendency called, 'the Witness of the Spirit.'"—*See on Job x.*

DR. OWEN. (A.D. 1668.)—Rom. viii. 16.) "'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God : ' The witness which our own spirits do give unto our adoption is the work and effect of the Holy Spirit in us. If it were not, it would be false, and not confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit himself, who is the Spirit of Truth ; 'and none knoweth the things of God but the Spirit of God.' (1 Cor. ii. 11.) If he declare not our Sonship in us and to us, we cannot know it. How doth he then bear witness to our spirits ? What is the distinct testimony ? It must be some such act of his as evidenceth itself to be from him, *immediately* unto them that are concerned in it, that is, those unto whom it is given."—*Discourse concerning the Spirit, sec. 9.*

"The Spirit worketh joy in the heart of believers immediately by himself, without the consideration of any other acts or works of his, or the interpositions of any reasonings, or deductions, or conclusions. This does not arise from our reflex consideration of the love of God, but rather gives occasion thereunto. He so sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts, and fills them with gladness by an immediate act and operation. Of this joy there is no account to be given, but that the Spirit worketh it when and how he will. He secretly infuseth and distills it into the soul, prevailing against all fears and sorrows, filling it with

others. We all exist morally on a perfect level. However various the characters of men may be,—however different their position with respect to the gospel prior to their

gladness, exultation, and sometimes with unspeakable rapture of the mind.”—*Treatise on “ Communion with God.”*

CASE. (A.D. 1670.)—“ Another office of the Spirit is that which divines call *immediate* ; and it is a bright irradiation of the Holy Ghost, beaming out upon the soul ; not only giving it a clear and distinct discerning of its own graces, but immediately witnessing to the soul its adoption by Jesus Christ, and right and title to the kingdom of God, wherein God speaks to the soul in some such language as this : ‘ I am thy Salvation ; I have blotted out thy transgressions ; thy sins are forgiven thee,’ &c. Now this act is usually called ‘ immediate ;’ that is, without any mediation of signs and evidences ; not but that there are signs and evidences in the persons testified, but that the Spirit makes no use of them in the act of testification. There are gracious qualifications in the soul, sufficient to distinguish and justify it from all the false witnesses of the lying spirit ; but the Spirit of God doth not refer to any of these qualifications in the act, but immediately darts in light and comfort, which fill the soul ‘ with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’—“ *Mount Pisgah.*”

DR. THOMAS HORTON. (A.D. 1670.)—“ ‘ The Spirit itself,’ or the self-same Spirit. This, it bears witness of our adoption, and state in grace. First, as it witnesses to our spirit, in its distinct and immediate testimony. Secondly, as it witnesses *with* our spirits, in its conjunctive and concurring testimony. The first of these testimonies

conversion,—it matters not,—we are all placed in precisely the same condition before God, and have all the same qualifications for spiritual enjoyment and holy pleasure,

is that which is distinct and immediate, wherein the Spirit of God does, without the intercurrent or mediation of any discourse on our part, or argument on his, signify his love and good-will to such as are partakers of it. To speak of the nature of it, it is nothing else than a gracious hint or intimation given to the soul by God, assuring our hearts and consciences of his favour and love towards us, and of our atonement and reconciliation with him through the blood of his Son. Be of good cheer ; thy sins are forgiven thee ; I am thy salvation ; and the like ;—such a secret and still voice and whispering there is sometimes to the soul, which a true believer is sensible of, working peace and joy in him. This, it is not argumentative, but declarative ; not by force of reason, but by immediateness of presence : as a very sight of a friend comforts a man, though he should not speak a word unto him. It is not a violent ecstasy or rapture of soul beyond itself, as illuminatists and enthusiasts, and such kind of people as those are, are sometimes deluded withal ; but a sober and judicious and composed frame of spirit, which lies not at all in the fancy, as the subject of it, but in the heart.” . . .
“This manner of testimony of the Spirit, whereof we now speak, it is secret and inexpressible,—an hidden mystery, and such as is easier felt and apprehended by those that have it, than it can be described or expressed to any that have it not ; as a man that tastes honey sweet, cannot make another to conceive the sweetness of it.”—“ *Sermons on the Eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.*”

through the rich provisions of the redeeming scheme. No mental peculiarity exists to prevent the attainment of this blessing ; no legal obstacles or moral disqualifications are

MANTON. (A.D. 1678.)—"No man hath satisfying comfort, by the blood of Christ, till it be sprinkled upon his heart, and applied to him by the Spirit of God, and thereby assured that it was shed for him."

"What have you to show that God is reconciled to you ? This is not evident, till we have the pledge of our reconciliation with God, the gift of the Holy Spirit. This affords infallible assurance of God's favour." Rom. viii. 16. 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. i. 13.—*Sermons on Job xix. 25. 4to.*

SAMUEL CLARK. (A.D. 1690.)—"The Spirit of God without consideration of, or reflecting upon, any of those gracious qualifications he has formerly wrought in the soul, and without present application of any scripture grounds to convince a man's soul that his testimony is true, does by his own immediate power, imprint this persuasion upon the heart,—'Thou art a child of God ;' and by an inward and secret, yet powerful, voice, doth say to the soul, 'Thou art a believer ; thy sins are pardoned ;' or to that purpose ; and so satisfies the soul concerning its state and condition : this is the immediate testimony to our spirit."—*Discourse concerning the Testimony of the Spirit.*

POOLE. (A.D. 1700.)—"The Spirit of adoption doth not only excite us to call upon God as our Father, but it doth ascertain and assure us, as before, that we are his children. And this it doth not by an outward voice, as God the Father to Jesus Christ, nor by an angel, as to

allowed to interfere,—for all are done away in Christ. As far, then, as personal fitness or mental constitution is concerned, each man stands on an equality with his fellow,

Daniel and the Virgin Mary, but by an inward and secret suggestion, whereby he raiseth our hearts to this persuasion, that God is our Father, and we are his children. This is not the testimony of the graces and operations of of the Spirit, but of the Spirit itself.”—*On Rom.* viii. 16.

DR. WATTS. (A.D. 1712.)—“There is an extraordinary witness of the Spirit ; and that is, when in an immediate and powerful manner the Holy Spirit impresses the soul with an assurance of divine love, and gives the heart of a saint such a full discovery of his adoption, without the more slow and argumentative method of comparing the dispositions of their souls with some special characters of the children of God in Scripture.”

DODDRIDGE. (A.D. 1746.)—“It is plainly implied that, besides the exercise of the rational powers, there is some peculiar operation of God upon the good man’s heart, to confirm his hope, and to animate his joy. The witness of the Spirit cannot be merely laying down those rules whereby the Christian character may be known ; for this is the witness that he bears, not merely to the children of God, but to all others. It surely implies something more than an assistance of the rational faculties in their enquiries. He might then be said to *enlighten*, but I cannot see how he could *testify*. Nor is it merely his working in us those graces which, upon a review, appear ; though that be an important operation ; but it is something by which he acts under the character of a comforter :

and we all alike exist in circumstances of need.

But the Scriptures afford yet more positive proof of the universal application of this high privilege. It is distinctly stated that "God is no respecter of persons," and throughout the New Testament, the "sealing" of the Spirit, and the "earnest" of the

it is the voice of God, inwardly speaking to the soul, to confirm its hopes and to awaken its joys, saying, Son ! Daughter ! be of good courage ; thy sins are forgiven thee."—*Sermon on the " Witness of the Spirit."*

In the Confession of Faith, issued by the ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES, under the article *Assurance*, we read,—

"Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in a state of grace, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God ; which hope shall never make them ashamed. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope ; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits, that we are the children of God ; which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption."

Spirit, are spoken of as common blessings, and are offered without restriction or limitation. The exhortations, also, of the sacred volume, in reference to this matter, are indiscriminate and general. In addressing the Hebrew converts, the apostle Paul uses language most remarkably explicit,—“We desire,” says he, “THAT EVERY ONE OF YOU do show the same diligence to the FULL ASSURANCE of hope unto the end.” Here all are addressed, and each individual member of the Church is stimulated to press after the enjoyment of that confidence which excludes doubt and banishes fear. To say that this exhortation was intended only for the first generation of Christians, is to admit a principle of interpretation pre-eminently dangerous; for if it be true, that the comforting influences and sealing operations of the Holy Ghost were peculiar to the first ages of the Church, and therefore have now ceased, it must of necessity follow, that as it regards its most important and essential privileges, the gospel dispensation itself has also ceased; inasmuch as according to this theory, we are

deprived of those rich consolations, and high and holy pleasures, which, in primitive times, were the result of the exercise of faith in the merits and mediation of Christ.

But it is not so. The salvation of the gospel is still a common one,—in the universality with which it is offered, and in the fulness with which it may be enjoyed. Let it but be proved that the apostles knew their own adoption, “and we may infer that this knowledge is a privilege of all believers, as well as theirs ; for the faith whereby they were assured was ordinary ; the grounds of assurance common to them with all true believers ; the benefit itself general, not in any special manner appropriated. What promises soever concerning life and happiness were made to the apostles, the same are made to all believers and confirmed and sealed in the same manner ; for they have one God, one Christ, one Spirit, they are under one Covenant and live by the same faith. The adoption of believers is confirmed on God’s part unto them by the witness of the Spirit with

the graces thereof."* The assurance of sonship is not the result of an arbitrary exercise of God's sovereignty in particular cases, but it arises in the ordinary constitution, development, and application of the Christian method of salvation, and is a blessing which every individual believer may constantly enjoy.

Objection IV.—The doctrine of the Direct Witness of the Spirit is calculated to lead to enthusiasm and fanaticism, and tends immediately and powerfully to licentiousness.

This will be recognized as an objection very similar in character to the one which, even from the earliest days of Christianity, has been urged against the great doctrine of Justification by faith alone. But however applied it is pointless and futile, inasmuch as it arises out of a partial and one-sided view of the Christian scheme. The witness of the Spirit is never enjoyed where there are not the renewings of the Spirit. The guard thus furnished by the sacred volume

* Ball on Faith : 4to.—1632 : page 256.

against laxity of principle or irregularity of practice is complete and perfect. To use the language of a pious writer,—“The witness we plead for, is the *holy* testimony, in concurrence with a *holy* gospel,—by a *Holy* Spirit,—to a *holy* man,—and concerning a *holy* truth. There can be no discrepancy, no want of harmony between the witness of the Spirit and the word of God. The Holy Spirit ever witnesses according to, and in agreement with the truth. Vague and fanciful impressions, visions, and voices, received and rested upon as evidences of salvation are powerful delusions. Nothing is to be received as an evidence of our divine sonship which does not square and harmonize with the revealed word of God.”* Faith, which bringeth a sense of pardon, is productive of good works; disobedience is incompatible with the existence of justifying faith; hence the witness of the Spirit continues not where sin is committed. Licentiousness may, indeed, be found connected with the presump-

* Winslow “on the Work of the Spirit:” chap. 7.

tuous conclusions of the Antinomian, or with the substitutions of the mere pretender, but the privilege of which we now speak is ever associated with holiness, and is productive of uniform and consistent piety.

The witness of the Spirit, it must always be borne in mind, is ever connected, in the sacred volume, with the witness of our "own spirit." In other words, it is always accompanied by the testimony of a good conscience; the consciousness of heavenly effects wrought within, and of a holy deportment manifested without. "For our rejoicing" (says the apostle) "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." (2 Cor. i. 12.) These two witnesses are combined for the purpose of mutual confirmation, and joined together they effectually preserve from delusion. Pardon is invariably succeeded by purity. Here, then, we have the touchstone by which to try the genuine character of our feelings. This twofold testimony, when it is vouchsafed, affords infal-

lible evidence of spiritual adoption and heavenly heirship. The fact that many have abused the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, and that enthusiasts and fanatics have professed to enjoy it whilst living in the practice of sin, proves nothing ; inasmuch as a madman's imagining himself to be a king, does not prove that there are no *real* kings.

: Objection V.—The Doctrine of the Direct Witness of the Spirit implies and involves nothing less than a “new and distinct revelation” made to man.

This objection, we think, has been satisfactorily met by a profound theologian, from whom we very cheerfully quote. “If by ‘a new revelation,’ is meant plenary inspiration, such as that by which prophets and apostles wrote the sacred scriptures, we deny the assumption ; and affirm that there is an obvious difference between that infallible inspiration, granted to the writers of the Scriptures, to know facts and doctrines which they were to publish to the world, and that individual conviction of adoption produced by the Holy

Spirit in the mind of the believer, and which concerns himself alone. But if the objectors call a mere impression, made upon the soul of man by the Holy Ghost, 'a new revelation,' they themselves are, in other cases, advocates for the necessity of such a revelation. They strenuously contend, that it is the Spirit of God which awakens the conscience of the sinner, and that no man is properly acquainted with his guilt and depravity, until God, by his Spirit, penetrates his soul with a painful conviction of the fact. Now the impression which the Spirit makes upon the soul, in order to its awakening, is as distinct, clear, and direct, as that which is made upon it in the happy moment of adoption; and, therefore, the one is as truly a 'a new revelation' as the other. And if the Spirit of God impresses on the humbled soul of the penitent this painful truth; 'I am now a guilty sinner, under the righteous displeasure of my eternal Judge, and liable to endless punishment;' will he not, when the same individual believes in Jesus Christ, and is, in point of fact, pardoned and adopted,

impress his heart with a joyful sense of the interesting change which has taken place? Will he wound, and will he not heal? Is he the 'Spirit of bondage unto fear,' and not 'the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba Father?' It is, indeed, cause of grateful astonishment that God should pardon guilty rebels against his government, and receive them into his family upon their believing acceptance of Christ; and well may we exclaim when adopted, 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!' But it is not a matter of so much wonder, though it is additional cause of rejoicing, that he should graciously *assure* us of our sonship when he has actually restored us to that relation to himself. Greater condescension is implied on the part of God in adopting us into his family, than in simply making known to our hearts the fact of our adoption. If, therefore, he bestows the greater blessing, will he withhold the less? Will he remit all our sins, constitute us fellow-citizens with the saints, and then abandon us to a distressing per-

plexity, as to whether we are 'heirs of glory,' or 'children of wrath even as others?' That be far from Him who has taught us to 're-joice evermore.' ”*

Objection VI.—The Direct Witness of the Spirit is unnecessary, inasmuch as the evidence borne by our own spirit is sufficient to produce assurance of the fact of the pardon of sin and acceptance with God.

To this objection two distinct answers may be given: 1.—It positively contradicts the testimony of the sacred volume, which asserts that there are two witnesses to the fact of the believer's adoption; whereas this theory confines the witness to a man's own spirit, contrary to the express terms in which the Scriptures teach the doctrine. 2.— It implies an *impossibility*. Without the previous testimony of the Holy Ghost, a man's own spirit can furnish no evidence as to his relative position to God. "It can take no cognizance of the mind of God as to actual pardon, and can, therefore, bear no witness,

* Grindrod's *Essay* on the "Witness of the Spirit."

to that fact. The Holy Spirit **ONLY**, who knows the mind of God, can be this witness ; and if the fact that God is reconciled to us can only be known by him, by him only can it be attested to us. It cannot, therefore, be as well for us (as some have said) to have recourse at once to the evidence of our own spirits ; because, as to this fact, our own spirits **HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO GIVE**. They cannot give *direct* evidence of our adoption, for we know not what passes in the mind of the invisible God : They cannot give *indirect* evidence of the fact, for no moral changes of which our spirits can be conscious, have been stated in Scripture as the proofs of our pardon ; they prove that there is a work of God in our hearts, but they are not proofs of our actual forgiveness." * We may, indeed, fairly infer from a review of our feelings and conduct that a change has been wrought in us, but whether that change has been preceded by the forgiveness, on God's part, of our past transgressions, is a matter, with-

* Watson's Theo. Institutes.

out the direct witness of the Spirit, left to conjecture and marked by doubt. There can be no "assurance,"—no certainty. The witness of God's Spirit must ever be antecedent to the witness of our own spirit. The first attestation of our sonship must come from heaven, and then in the "fruits of holiness," we may legitimately seek for the corroborative evidences of our high and sacred relationship.

But still it is asserted by many, that *the work of the Spirit in us*, and the *testimony of the Spirit in the Word*, are of themselves sufficient to lead to a satisfactory conclusion as to our adoption into the divine family. This view has been very strongly put by a distinguished writer. "There is one very obvious way," (says he) "in which the Spirit may bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God ; or in which, according to the translation of many, the Spirit may bear witness to or attest to our spirit that we are God's children. It is He who worketh a work of grace in our souls, and that work may become manifest to our own consciences.

We may read the lineaments of our now renovated character ; and it may be regarded as an exercise of our own spirit, that by which we become acquainted with the new features or the new characteristics that have been formed upon ourselves. And we may furthermore read in the Bible, what be the Scripture marks of the new creature ; and as all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God—this is one way in which a joint testimony may be made out between God's Spirit and our spirit upon the subject ; or in which a communication may be made to pass from the one to the other—so that they both shall concur in one and the same sentence, that we are indeed God's children. The part that the Spirit of God hath had in this matter is, that he both graves upon us the lineaments of a living epistle of Christ Jesus, and tells us in the epistle of a written revelation what those lineaments are. The part which our own spirit has is, that, with the eye of consciousness, we read what is in ourselves ; and with the eye of the understanding, we read what is in the book of

God's testimony : and upon our perceiving that such as the marks of grace which we find within, so are the marks of grace which we observe in the description of that word without that the Spirit hath indited, we arrive at the conclusion that we are born of God."*

Now, in replying to these remarks, we must premise that we object to this view principally on the ground that it *falls below the gospel standard* ; it is correct so far as it goes, but it fails to comprehend the *whole truth*. There is here no proper recognition of the Spirit in his character of "WITNESS ;" for surely there is a well defined and striking distinction between the *work* of the Spirit in *regeneration*, and the *testimony* of the Spirit as to our *adoption*. This view, notwithstanding the reference that is made in it to the Holy Ghost, ultimately devolves the entire work of ascertaining our adoption upon our own spirits ; which directly con-

* Dr. Chalmers :—" Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans," chap. viii. 16.

tradicts the statement of Scripture, for it is not written, "the Spirit does certain things, from which we ourselves may draw certain conclusions ;" but, "the Spirit *itself* BEARETH WITNESS." Plainly, the reference is not to our own *inferences* from the work of the Spirit, but to an act of the Spirit himself. "*He himself* told me," is an expression equivalent to "the Spirit *itself* beareth witness," and expresses both the informer, and the immediateness of the information ; and as, were an individual to state that a *man himself* told him concerning a certain thing, we should never suppose that the knowledge was obtained inferentially ; so when the Bible declares, that "the Spirit *itself* BEARETH WITNESS with our spirit that we are the children of God," we have every reason to conclude that the agent is divine, and his testimony directly communicated. The evidence of Scripture, on this subject, we take to be most conclusive.

But there are other objections to the view against which we are now contending. The testimony of our own spirit,

viewed separate and apart from the more direct and immediate witness of the Holy Ghost, must, we think, upon examination, appear (even to those who deny the doctrine for which we now plead) *utterly incapable of imparting full and complete satisfaction to the mind*. Take the highest degree of evidence which a man's own spirit can furnish in reference to his acceptance by Christ, and it can never amount to anything more than mere *probability*. It is quite true, that the Word of God very faithfully delineates the characters of those who are adopted into the divine family ; but is it not evident, even to the most superficial thinker, that we are in imminent danger of coming to false conclusions, when the decision, as it regards our state, *is left to be reasoned out* ? That decision would, unquestionably, be greatly affected by our capability of reasoning, which greatly differs among men. It would be affected, also, by our constitutional temperament,—the timid and desponding drawing conclusions unfavourable to themselves ; the bold and sanguine as naturally putting

the most pleasing construction upon the faintest evidences of a moral change. The inherent and universal principle of self-love in man would also greatly endanger the soundness of our conclusions,—this prompting us to hope the best even under circumstances of a doubtful or suspicious character. Now, it is evident from these considerations that much uncertainty would necessarily attach itself to the mere conclusions of our own minds ; lingering doubts would mar the satisfaction of the most sincere ; and considerable latitude would be given for apprehension with thoughtful persons—the most thoughtful being the most liable to apprehension and distress. On these grounds we perceive the necessity of *another* testimony—a testimony direct from God himself. And this is graciously vouchsafed to the believer. There is first, bestowed upon the child of God, the secret, inwrought, divine conviction of sonship ; and this is tested and attested by a comparison of our state with the requirements of the written word. Thus a double guard is placed around our spiritual

and eternal interests ; and an adequate protection is furnished against presumption on the one hand, and despondency on the other.

We have thus endeavoured, briefly, to examine the principal objections usually brought to bear against the doctrine of "full assurance," arising out of the immediate testimony of the Holy Ghost to the believer of his acceptance in Christ. That this doctrine has been branded as the "day-dream of enthusiasts," and the "invention of fanatical and ignorant men," we are quite aware. But would it not be well for the parties who indulge in those hasty and random charges to pause before they proceed further ? Would it not be for their spiritual advantage seriously to propound to their own hearts, the question which the high priest of old put upon an occasion of great importance,—"Are these things so ?" That the men of the world should deny any such testimony as the one of which we speak, is not a matter of surprise. *They* make their own experience the rule by which they judge ;

hence they deny the comforting influences of the Divine Spirit because they have never felt them. Paul has given us the philosophy of this case in reference to these individuals:—"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." But that men of enlightened heads and evangelized hearts should reject a doctrine so clearly revealed, may well fill us with astonishment and sorrow. One of the most important and distinguishing doctrines of the sacred book is thus handed over to the enemy; the gospel standard of experience is very greatly lowered; a meagre and dwarfish piety is engendered; and practically, the Holy Ghost, in his work and offices, is dishonoured. To those who, up to the present time, have rejected this portion of "the counsel of God," would we solemnly address the language of exhortation and entreaty, and earnestly call upon them to "search the Scriptures," that they may be fully persuaded in their minds as to "whether these things are so."

If this doctrine be from heaven, we are "sinners against our own souls," if we enjoy not continually the evidence of it in our hearts. This we take to be one important part of our "high calling in Christ Jesus," and towards the attainment of this should the seeker of salvation constantly aspire !

CHAPTER III.

PRACTICAL BEARINGS OF THE DOCTRINE.

THE doctrine of the direct and immediate witness of the Spirit, it may be fairly inferred from the remarks already made, is not a mere matter of speculation, nor is it one constituting a minor feature in the Christian system. It is of great practical importance, and almost more than any other is connected with personal experience and enjoyment. Let us proceed to notice some of the bearings of this great truth.

1.—*A Divine conviction of acceptance in Christ is requisite in order to the exercise of those filial affections, and the discharge of those filial duties, which mark and characterize the children of God.*

A *consciousness* of adoption must ever precede the *fruits* of adoption. We must know that we are the children of God, before we can manifest the dispositions of children. For example: We cannot *love* God until we have the assurance that he loves us. The testimony of the apostle John on this subject is most express,—“We love him because he first loved us.” But no mere consideration of the GENERAL love of God to the human race, can produce this grace. We must know him as OUR God, reconciled to us, before we can manifest the affection of children.—We cannot exercise *confidence* in God, until we have the assurance of his fatherly interest in us. It is quite true, that we may profess a general and vague trust in him as an all-wise and ever gracious Being; but that filial repose which banishes doubt and annihilates distrust,—that confidence which says, amid the heavings of the billows and the howlings of the tempest, “My Father guides the helm, I will trust and not be afraid,” can never be enjoyed. There must be a sense of personal interest in the paternal care of God,

to enable us thus unreservedly to commit ourselves to the guidance and protection of his providence.—We cannot manifest acceptable *submission* to God, until we are assured by his Spirit that his are the corrections, not of an angry ruler but of an indulgent Father. The Spirit of adoption gives a new character to our feelings under the chastisements of the Divine Being; it imparts a sweetness to our very trials. A sense of the sovereignty of God may, indeed, produce a sullen and reluctant submission, such as a man would yield to inevitable necessity, or to overwhelming power; but it is the Spirit of adoption alone that views every trial as a Father's chastisement, and connects every stroke of the rod with a Father's love.—We cannot have filial *intercourse* with God until we enjoy an inward assurance of acceptance with him through the death of his Son. We must know that he is our reconciled God and Father, when we approach him, or we shall fail to manifest that confidence which is well pleasing in his sight. If we have any misgivings as to the fact of

our adoption, we shall, of necessity, display great hesitancy and timidity in our prayers. Nothing so much alters the style and tenor of a man's devotions as the assurance of his divine sonship. Previous to this, his prayers are the expression of an anxious and fearful heart; afterwards, they are the outpourings of a spirit confiding in a Father's wisdom, rejoicing in a Father's love, and committing itself to a Father's care. Under the Spirit of bondage, prayer, instead of being a sweet and refreshing privilege, is felt to be a task; it is dictated by fear more than by faith; it is the language of a criminal addressing his Judge, or a slave deprecating his master's wrath, rather than the language of a child communing with his parent. But in the possession of the "witness of the Spirit," a filial disposition is created, and the humble believer drawing near unto the throne of grace, can boldly cry, "Abba Father."

Now, upon this consciousness of filial relationship to God, is entirely dependent, we say, the exercise of filial affections. It we are in doubt as to our sonship, we shall

necessarily be defective in the culture and exhibition of childlike dispositions. We might as well look for fruit from a tree when severed from its root, or attempt to rear a superstructure without a foundation, as to expect the feelings of a child from one who is ignorant of his filial relationship, and who knows not as to whether he has yet received the "adoption of a son."* In all his reasoning about his relative position to God, the first link in the chain of evidence

* "Were not the testimony of this state (Adoption) thus given, no man could possibly have any assurance of his salvation which would beget confidence and love. If, to any man, his acceptance with God be hypothetical, then his confidence must be so too. His love to God must be hypothetical, his gratitude hypothetical, his obedience hypothetical. 'If God have forgiven me my sins, then I should love him, and I should be grateful, and I should testify my gratitude by my obedience.' But who does not see that this must necessarily depend upon the 'if' in the first case. All this uncertainty, and the perplexities resulting from it, God has precluded by sending forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, by which we cry, *Abba Father!* And thus our adoption into the heavenly family is testified and ascertained unto us in the only way in which it can possibly be done, by the *direct* influence of the Spirit of God. Remove this from Christianity and it is but a dead letter."—*Dr. Adam Clarke.*

is lacking; and where this is wanting there must inevitably be doubt,—and the inseparable attendants of doubt, indecision and fear.

2.—*A Divine conviction of acceptance in Christ, and an assurance of filial relationship to God, is requisite in order to our growth in grace and advancement in holiness.*

If we are not quite sure of our admission into the family of God, we cannot, of course, “go on unto perfection.” We may, indeed, linger about the gate of life, but we cannot make progress in the paths of piety. We may be continually “laying the foundation of repentance from dead works,” but we shall never realize in our experience the description of the wise man, “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” If we are ignorant of the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, how can we attain unto an acquaintance with the “deep things of God?” We must, certainly, be familiar with the first rudiments of spiritual learning, before we can hope to reach the higher branches of heavenly lore. The foundation must be

laid before the top-stone can be "brought on with shouting, "Grace, Grace unto it." We must know that we have been "born again," and that, therefore, we are "babes in Christ," before we can attain "unto the stature of perfect men," or become "fathers" in the Church.

The history of many professors of religion, in almost every church, furnishes illustrations on this subject. How many awakened and serious persons, forming, perhaps, the most interesting members of our congregations, for want of being properly instructed in the work of the Spirit, as the "Spirit of adoption," walk in darkness, and drag on heavily? We see them year after year, but they have scarcely made any perceptible advancement in the divine life; still they are sighing for deliverance and groaning for liberty. The burden of their song is now, precisely what it was in the earlier period of their religious career,—

" 'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I his, or am I not?"

Thus the service of religion is proved to be anything but "perfect freedom;" her "ways" are not those of "pleasantness," nor are her paths "peace." A habit of religious gloom is induced, and not unfrequently is the gospel dishonoured, and its ministers discouraged.

3.—*The direct witness of the Spirit to the fact of adoption is necessary, in order to make our afflictions light and our trials easy in passing through life.*

An assurance of relationship to God is calculated to impart comfort and afford satisfaction, even amid the severest trials and the most complicated distresses. Nothing short of a divine consciousness of acceptance in Christ can give peace under many of the "ills that flesh is heir to." Without this, we are necessarily ignorant as to whether it is the sword of an offended Sovereign or the rod of a kind parent that is lifted up against us. We must be certain of our sonship, before we can appropriate the promises which are given to sons, or rejoice in the consolations which are offered unto the

“heirs of salvation.” Until we have the inward evidence of our adoption, we have no right to take “the children’s bread,” and feast upon portions which were designed only for members of the family. It is “*If* children, then heirs;” heirs not only to those joys which are future and eternal, but also to those spiritual supports which are requisite to sustain and cheer in this the house of our pilgrimage.

“If children, then heirs!” Oh, how exhaustless is the storehouse of grace, and how extensive and valuable is the believer’s patrimony below! Not only has the child of God a right and title to heaven, but to rich consolation on the road to heaven. He has many troubles; but he is “heir” to the PROMISES. And are not these “exceeding great and precious?” In the trials of earth the believer can recognize the operations of a Father’s hand; and this is a balm and cordial to his spirit,—“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth:” “These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out

for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:" "All things work together for good to them that love God." It is only when we can thus cry, "Abba, Father," that the afflictions of life really appear light. Each additional trial, then, assumes the character of an additional workman, set on by the great Master to accomplish in us that complete meetness for heaven which is required. We feel that God "does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men," that there is a "needs-be" for every stroke of his rod; that some wise purpose is to be accomplished, some gracious end is to be answered; hence in humble submission and childlike confidence the believer is enabled to "cast his burden on the Lord," meekly saying, "Father, not my will, but thine be done."

4.—*A Divine conviction of adoption is requisite in order to make Death comfortable, and to impart peace and satisfaction in the prospect of our approaching dissolution.*

Without an assurance of our membership in the divine family, the last great act in the

drama of life will be "a leap in the dark." If we know not as to whether we have made our peace with God, with what feelings can we enter his more immediate presence? Doubts and fears in a dying hour are terrible indeed. But what can dispel those doubts or dissipate those fears, when about to cross "the swellings of Jordan," but the direct and immediate testimony of the Holy Ghost,—the inward voice of the Spirit, saying, "Fear not, for I am with thee: Be not discouraged, I am thy God?" Nothing can light up the "dark valley of the shadow of death," but the bright beams of the sun of righteousness. If then we are destitute of the rays which emanate from that divine source, we shall have to pass from earth in gloom, and no distinct testimony for Jesus will throw a charm around the dying scene, or invest with solemn sacredness the place of our repose. No pleasing reminiscences will steal across the memory of our friends, when calling to mind the circumstances that marked our exit; nor will any joyous anticipations of reunion give a lightness and elasticity to

their spirits amid the conflicts of earth. All will be dark,—dreary as the sepulchre, and desolate as the charnel-house which contains our clay! But possessed of “the witness of the Spirit,” how striking is the contrast! What calmness in the prospect of approaching dissolution! What joy in the midst of severest agonies! Heaven bursts upon the sight;—the ears “with sounds seraphic ring!” The celestial convoy seem already to cheer by their presence, and the departing one, animated and sustained by a power divine, is enabled to exclaim,—“O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?” “Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better!”

Now, such are some of the practical bearings of the important doctrine here introduced to the attention. The “witness of the Spirit,” it will be seen, intimately associates itself with our duties and our joys; it affects both our experience and our practice; it gives a cheerfulness to our piety, and creates a sacred zest for the discharge of all the duties of life. But it may be asked,—“May not God,

as a Sovereign, for inscrutable reasons, and in certain cases, withhold or withdraw from his children this divine testimony, and cause them, for a time, at least, to walk in darkness?" To this we reply :—There is no Scripture to support such an opinion ; nor are we warranted by the Bible to suppose that God, in his character of Sovereign, will do any thing arbitrarily or capriciously to affect the happiness or the holiness of those who put their trust in him. It is quite true, that the people of God have not always the same bright and joyous evidence of the divine favour. Physical causes have a powerful influence on our joys and sorrows. The weakness of the body, the deadness of the animal spirits, may do much to promote a condition of comparative gloom, and may create a state of mind congenial to the existence of doubts and fears. But even at such seasons, if there be no unfaithfulness on the part of man, God will prove faithful, unchangeable to his covenant engagements, and unwavering in the exercise and display of his Fatherly affections. On the part of

the saint there may not be, for the causes now assigned, that "joy in believing" which aforetime was wont to animate and cheer; but if there has been no secret sin, no inward departure from God, there will be at least, such a sense of the divine favour as will save from tormenting fear; such an assurance of acceptance, as will sustain even in the darkest hour of our earthly pilgrimage. "Let it be remembered," (says the pious Doddridge) "that it is a very great truth that a Christian may firmly believe that he is a child of God, and yet, at the same time, may have but little sensible joy in that persuasion; because that joy, in a great measure, depends on the lively view which he has of the privileges connected with the relation; and it is one thing to value them, and another to rejoice in them." The believer is not dependent upon secret and unaccountable impulses for his bliss; he has constantly a well-spring of peace within. He is not, as many have insinuated, left at the mercy of *frames and feelings*. He rises above them; he does not

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despise them, but he is superior to them. He can fall back upon something more abiding and certain,—the inward testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is true, the storm may howl about him, but the “still small voice” of a Father’s love rises distinctly above that storm, and proclaims him yet a “son and heir.” The clouds may blacken over his head, but though no sun is visible, he knows full well that still it shines, and that speedily it will dissipate the darkness and banish the gloom. Thus, if we are faithful, we may ever enjoy a comfortable persuasion of our acceptance with God, an inward assurance of our adoption into the divine family.

But still, as there are many serious persons destitute of the “witness of the Spirit,” it is a question frequently proposed,—“May not the absence of the Spirit’s witness be accounted for in many cases, solely by a natural and constitutional tendency to mental depression?” We will reply, in the language of a late writer on this subject. “Constitutional depression may prevent the soul from

exercising faith in Christ, and, as faith is the instrument by which we receive the Spirit's witness, the absence of that instrument through depression will, of course, be the occasion of our being destitute of the Spirit's witness. As mental depression affects our perceptions generally, it will doubtless affect and distort our religious perceptions ; and in instances deeply exacerbated may so fix and concentrate the soul's attention on what is gloomy, as to create for itself a region of darkness in which it cannot see the benign features of God's character, nor the mercy so brightly revealed in the Gospel. Thus, through a mental infirmity obscuring our views, our confidence fails ; and our confidence failing, our evidence fails too. Such cases, however, are to be regarded as instances of mental disease, and not to be taken as a standard for others whose minds are in a healthy state. Darkness of mind is originated by sin, by negligence, by as purious or defective experience, as well as by constitutional infirmity ; and indeed the former are, we are persuaded, the most frequent causes

of the absence of the Spirit's witness. The biography of good men shows that even where there is a constitutional tendency to mental depression, still, sound conversion and christian fidelity have ordinarily been accompanied with a sense of God's favour. The devoted BRAINARD had a natural tendency to depression, and sunk sometimes into depths of melancholy ; but observes his biographer, 'At these times, he was not exercised about the state of his soul, with regard to the favour of God, and his interest in Christ, but about his own infirmities and unfitness for God's service.'” The pious Dr. PARSON had a natural tendency to depression, but says his biographer, “His melancholy never, in a single instance that is recollected, brought him into bondage, through fear of death. He invariably contemplated an exchange of worlds with complacency, as a desirable event ; as a consummation devoutly to be wished.” Whatever exceptions, therefore, may be admitted in exacerbated cases of mental disease, it may be broadly stated as a scriptural truth, that it is the privilege

of God's people to know that they are pardoned, by the Spirit given unto them ; and that by those who habitually walk with God, this witness will be enjoyed."*

An inward assurance of acceptance with God is thus, under all the ordinary circumstances of life, the privilege of the humble believer in Jesus ; and whilst this "assurance" is a solace to the Christian amid the varied distresses of earth, it invigorates and establishes all the virtues and graces of his character. The witness of the Spirit will produce a deep sense of our own unworthiness : it will create a relish for all the exercises of holy communion with God ; it will lead to proper affections and regard to the Lord Jesus Christ ; it will excite to a greater zeal for the divine honour and service ; and it will be made manifest in earnest yet resigned desires to enter upon the heavenly inheritance. The practical bearings of this sublime privilege are, indeed, most important. It throws a charm around even the secular duties of existence, whilst it affords

* Cook's Theological Tracts ; No. 13, page 306.

an earnest of celestial joys, and enables its possessor to walk as on the verge of heaven.

“Happy the people that is in such a case : yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.”

CHAPTER IV.

DIRECTIONS TO SEEKERS.

HAVING endeavoured, in the former chapters, to present a brief but comprehensive view of the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, and having furnished those proofs and evidences which the sacred Scriptures and christian experience afford, we shall now proceed to suggest certain counsels, adapted to the state and feelings of those who are seeking the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. To lead to the personal enjoyment of "full assurance,"—to aid the humble and contrite to secure this "pearl of great price,"—is the sole object at which we aim. Eternal Spirit! shine upon thine own work, and guide us into the way of truth!

The work of the Holy Ghost, in Conviction, is two-fold. First,—*To bring the sinner to feel his need of a Saviour.* This accomplished, the second stage in the Spirit's work, is so to enlighten the mind concerning Christ, as to give the sinner to feel, that *the Saviour provided is just such an one as he needs.* These two points constitute the Spirit's ultimatum in Conviction. In order, however, that the Spirit may be successful in his operations, and especially that the "Spirit of bondage to fear" may be exchanged for the "Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father," there are corresponding duties to be performed by the convinced sinner. To assist the penitent to perform these duties, and to lay hold upon Christ, we give the following directions.

1.—*Seek to obtain correct views of the relation in which the Holy Spirit stands to the Christian scheme, and endeavour, especially, to comprehend the nature of the work devolving upon him as the "Spirit of Adoption."*

Incorrect notions respecting the offices and operations of the Holy Ghost, have frequently



tended to perplex and discourage the simple seeker of salvation. Now, it is of the utmost importance that we bear in mind, that the Spirit is the fruit of the Messiah's intercession, and the abiding Representative of the Messiah's presence in the Church. Among the first of those "gifts" which Christ by his sacrifice secured for men, was the gift of the Spirit; hence the humble penitent may "now come boldly unto the Throne of Grace," feeling assured that as Christ has entered into covenant engagement both with his Father and with his people, in reference to this matter, he will perform that which he has pledged himself to accomplish. The gift of the Holy Ghost is a *purchased* and a *promised* one;—and thus it is written,—“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither

knoweth him : but ye know him ; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." By virtue of the Saviour's sacrifice, we may humbly, yet confidently, claim our right to the Spirit as our Comforter, Sanctifier, and Guide.

False views of the nature of the Spirit's operations in attesting the fact of the believer's adoption, also, frequently obstruct the exercise of faith on the part of the penitent. How often is there a putting aside the "witness of the Spirit," because it is not accompanied by external manifestations ! We expect, perhaps, some supernatural vision, or some divine voice, to assure us of our acceptance, or, at any rate, we look for some extatic and overpowering emotions to attend the "sealing" of our spirits ; and because God does not manifest himself in the "strong wind," or in the "earthquake," or in the "fire" of religious feeling, we refuse to listen to the "still small voice," which quietly whispers our sins forgiven. We test the Spirit's operations by our own preconceived opinions, and endeavour to bind down

the Deity to a mode of working consistent with our own views. But this is dishonouring to God and injurious to ourselves. It is true, that the Divine Being has sometimes thus manifested himself unto man ; but ordinarily the Spirit works more secretly, and with less of " observation " takes up his abode in the heart as Comforter and friend. Let us be grateful, when upon the exercise of faith in Christ, we find that, in this sense, "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance."

2.—*Sacredly cherish the convictions and impressions of which you have been the subject; yet, at the same time, guard against supposing that by any process of penitence you can render yourself fit for the blessing of pardon.*

It is the solemn and imperative duty of every individual desiring salvation to cherish conviction. Nothing, perhaps, has a greater tendency to weaken, and eventually to annihilate religious impressions than to encourage the feeling, (and this feeling will

occasionally steal over every repentant soul) that because we are the subjects of spiritual influences, we shall certainly at some time or other, be savingly converted. No such thing. Hell is teeming with individuals who once bade equally fair for heaven as ourselves. We must foster conviction, or after all we shall be lost. And yet it becomes us to be exceedingly jealous of ourselves in respect to this matter. There is in every individual a strong natural inclination to *do* something by way of meriting acceptance at the hands of God ; hence feelings of penitence are often cherished for the express purpose of pleading them before God, as reasons why we may hope for the exercise of his mercy. Or, if these feelings be not openly pleaded, there is, at least, something like a latent, lurking repose of the soul upon them, in conjunction with the atonement of Christ. Self is associated with the Saviour in procuring pardon. There is thus, often a feeling of pride clinging even to the convinced sinner ; a notion that something like personal merit must, after all, be mixed up

with God's doings in the great work of human salvation. Now, it is of infinite importance for us to remember, that when we are accepted of God, we are accepted not as having in the least possible degree, by penitence or otherwise, paid any part of the penalty due to our crimes, but solely on the ground of entire and absolute repose upon the sacrifice of Christ. Our contrition for sin and our exertions for salvation, do not merit or deserve salvation. If we receive it, it is because, without any mixture of self, or trust in our own doings or feelings, we have exercised faith in the great Redeemer of the world.

A great theological error,—an error having its seat in the heart of man, rather than in his head,—namely, *that holiness must, in some measure, precede acceptance with God, —that sanctification goes before justification,*—lies at the foundation of the feeling of which we now speak. It is no uncommon thing to find enquirers labouring under the idea, that before they are *qualified* to receive pardon, they must be prepared with a better

heart for the reception of that blessing than the one they now possess ; and in endeavouring to realize this preliminary qualification many spend whole years the subjects of bondage and the victims of distress. These individuals, though perhaps they know it not, are striving to transfer themselves from the class of sinners to that of saints. But now, mark what the Scripture saith :—"To him that worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth **THE UNGODLY**, his faith is counted for righteousness." We are received simply in our character as "**SINNERS**," without any imputation of merit or deserving, arising out of our desires, our prayers, our penitence, or our tears. We can never be pleasing to the Divine Being till we believe in Christ. To think, therefore, of preparing ourselves for an acceptable approach unto the Saviour, argues an entire ignorance of God's method of saving sinners, and may generally be traced to the existence of a secret principle of self-righteousness. We desire to have powerful convictions, deep emotions, poignant sorrow, only that we

may have something upon which to repose ; something of our own to commend us to the Saviour ; something to render us less dependent upon free, unmerited, boundless grace. We would feign have some share of glory in the work of salvation, and divide the merit betwixt God and ourselves. But this cannot be. God will have all the praise. We must come as mere beggars ; empty handed, "without money and without price," and casting ourselves upon the merits of Christ, await the gracious words which shall pronounce our pardon and seal our peace.

But whilst we would thus guard the seeker of salvation against supposing that he can in any manner prepare himself for an acceptable approach unto God, we would, at the same time, strongly insist on the necessity of being willing to make a full consecration of all our powers unto the divine service. There must be no keeping back "any part of the price ;" no reservation ; no fostering of any secret disposition or propensity which we believe to be contrary to the divine will ; no living in the known

commission of any one sin. We must not only be content, but anxious to give up all for God. God will have our whole hearts, or he will reject our sacrifice. "If I *regard* iniquity in my heart," (said David) "the Lord will not hear me." "Are the consolations of God small with thee?" (asked Eliphaz the Temanite, of the afflicted Job,) "*Is there any secret thing with thee?*" The cherishing of any lust, or the indulgence of any practice condemned in the sacred book, is utterly incompatible with the enjoyment of the divine favour. The language of the poet must be expressive of the feeling of our spirits,

"Is there a thing beneath the sun,
That strives with thee my heart to share?
Ah, tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of every motion there!"

It is when we are thus made willing to present ourselves "a living sacrifice" unto God, that the time of our salvation draweth nigh. *Then*,—but not *till then*,—will God come down, reveal himself to our spirits, take possession of our souls, and make our hearts his home!

3.—*Endeavour to get clear and scriptural views of the ability and willingness of the Lord Jesus Christ to save even the vilest and worst.*

There are often conflicting and even contradictory emotions at work in the bosom of the penitent. Sometimes he is disposed to trust in his own feelings of penitence, and to present these to God as an equivalent for his favour ; at other seasons he is so struck with the magnitude and peculiar aggravations of his guilt, as to question whether even the blood of Christ can avail to procure his pardon. And thus alternately the seeker of salvation is prompted to presumption, or well-nigh driven to despair. Now, of the folly of relying in the least degree upon our repentance, we have already spoken. Of the sin and danger of calling in question either the ability or willingness of Christ to save all who come unto him, we would also speak. On this subject the Scriptures are most explicit. The magnitude of crime and the crimson aggravation of crime, the Sacred Book distinctly states,

throw no obstacle in the way of the sinner's acceptance with God. However enormous the mass of guilt, the stock of merit in the Saviour's treasury is greater still. However "sin may have abounded," divine "grace may much more abound." If it were possible to accumulate on one devoted head the guilt of all the crimes of all the men at present existing in the world, that man, thus laden with iniquity, venturing upon the atonement of Christ, would find mercy and forgiveness at the hands of God. The question, as to the amount of sin, enters not into God's calculations when he pronounces pardon. Christ has made "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world:" "whosoever, therefore, that believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." As it regards the fact of sin we all stand upon a perfect level; "every mouth is stopped;" "the whole world is guilty before God." We must all, therefore, be saved in the same way, on the same terms, through the merit of the same great propitiatory sacrifice. "But

shall we sin that grace may abound ; God forbid." Rather let us take courage to approach near unto the mercy-seat, that we may be saved both from its guilt and power. The ability and willingness of Christ to save even the chief of sinners furnishes no warrant to men to continue in sin ; on the contrary, it presents a reason why we should humbly, but confidently, hope to be rescued from its degrading thralldom. "Him that cometh unto me," (saith the Saviour) "I will in no wise cast out."

4.—*Venture upon Christ, just as you are, without waiting either for deeper conviction of sin, or for more suitable opportunities in which to exercise faith.*

No other preparation in the sinner's mind is necessary in order that he may exercise faith and be saved, than a consciousness of his lost and ruined state by nature and practice. The moment a man knows and feels that he is a condemned sinner ; in other words, the moment he is convinced of his alienation from God, he is invited to believe in Christ and to hope for pardon. That very

instant the man is in a fit state to receive pardon, nor can he ever be more so. Though his future days should be spent in contrition the most unfeigned ; in prayers the most ardent ; in acts of penance the most severe ; in charities the most ample and diffusive, it would avail not : he would not be one whit the more deserving than when he started in his course. "The sinner is condemned, and is any moment after conviction in a state to be retrieved."* The simple condition of salvation is that we feel our need of it, and that we cast our souls upon Christ in order to obtain it. No sooner is the question proposed by the sincere and conscience-stricken penitent,— "What must I do to be saved?" than the Spirit is ready to apply the answer,— "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"†

* James' "Anxious Inquirer."

† "It is a fact we must ever bear in mind, that in the matter of our salvation faith is *simply a receiver*. I say *in the matter of our salvation*, because, when we are saved, faith becomes a principle of action, and hence as to *Christians*, we read of the 'work of faith,' and the 'fight

To the earnest seeker of pardon we would insist on the duty of an *exclusive* and an *immediate* "looking to Jesus." "LOOK UNTO ME, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,

of faith,' and the 'walk of faith.' But all these and similar expressions as to faith, concern real Christians—those who have been justified by faith ; our present inquiry relates to faith as it respects our salvation and the assurance of it ; and here it is simply a receiver.

"You, dear reader, have probably looked on the matter in a different light. You probably have been looking into yourself for faith, as though it could thus be discerned ; or, viewing it as an act or work to be performed, you have been on the one hand endeavouring to perform it, and on the other hand perplexing yourself to know whether your endeavours have been successful. But let me remind you, that it is not said, 'He that believes himself *to be a believer*, hath everlasting life,' but 'He that BELIEVETH ON THE SON hath everlasting life.' You proceed as though salvation had been made to depend on discerning yourself to be a believer, instead of discerning Christ to be the only and all-sufficient Saviour. It is indeed important that we should be conscious of our being believers ; but seeing that as to the point in hand, faith is simply a receiver, we get this consciousness by our attention being directed to the OBJECT of faith—to that which faith receives—not by separating faith from its object, and enquiring if we have got it. Faith has no existence apart from its object ; and if it had, or could have, it would have no value. It is Christ that is the Saviour ; and faith saves *only as it receives him*. It is God who testifies to us of Christ ; and faith saves *only as it receives His*

for I am God, and there is none else." "*Now* is the accepted time ; *now* is the day of salvation." "Look from the Law to the Gospel—from the curse to the cross—from Sinai,

testimony. The saving efficacy is not in our faith, but in that which faith receives.

" . . . 'As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' It is the *receiving* him that saves. But surely it is because of what HE is who is thus received, not because of any efficacy *in the act of receiving him*. He is such a one that the eye that rests on Jesus, beholds in him the image of the invisible God, and discerns in him that God is love. The ear that listens to Jesus, receives from his lips the assurances of a love to which any are welcome, and from which the vilest and the guiltiest are not excluded. The heart that receives Jesus receives salvation and everlasting life. If you can but forget these questionings about yourself, and really discern who HE is, and what the errand on which HE came—this of itself would so make you feel that no one can be unwelcome with him—nor any apply to him in vain—that your heart would be liberated, and you would feel yourself at home in the presence of such ineffable grace.

" 'Yes,' you say, 'if I were but in his presence ! If I could but have been among the crowd when the woman touched him, or near the cross when the dying thief confided in him !' Beloved reader, it was not the seeing or hearing with the outward eye or ear that had in itself any saving efficacy then. How many saw and heard Jesus thus, who saw no more beauty in him that they should desire him, than the multitudes who hear of him or read about him now ! The natural eye might see Jesus ; the

with its thunderings and lightnings, to Calvary, where the lawgiver became the law-fulfiller, and the end of that law for righteousness to every one that believeth! Look, even *now*, under all your legal terrors, to Christ, as the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world; and to God in Christ, as reconciling the world to himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses; and on the instant when you apprehend the great truth, that, just as God is, and guilty as you feel yourselves to be, God can be, through Christ's propitiation, the just God, and yet the Saviour,—on that instant you may pass from a state of bondage into the liberty of a child, and feel that a new spirit is given to you, even the spirit of adoption, whereby you may cry, 'Abba, Father.' And that you may be encouraged to avail yourselves of this gracious deliverance, remember, that while the calls and invitations of the gospel are

natural ear might hear him; yea, the thoughts might be busy about him; but it was *faith* that really saw him, really heard him, really received him, really discerned who he was. And *this only* can give conscious peace."—*Anon. On the "Assurance of Salvation."*

alike universal and free, so that they belong to sinners as such, and to all sinners without exception ; yet, as if with a special view to your case, they are often particularly addressed to such as are labouring under the spirit of bondage unto fear ;—not that careless and fearless sinners are excluded, because all are invited, even the wicked and the unrighteous,—but to meet the difficulties, and fears, and scruples of convinced and awakened sinners, they are mentioned as it were by name,—‘ Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden ; and I will give you rest.’—‘ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.’—‘ Whoever is athirst let him come, and take the water of life freely.’ ”* *Now* venturing upon Christ, you may feel that he is able to save you *now*.

But some may be ready to ask the question,—How may we know as to whether or not *we* are really the subjects of the convincing work of the Holy Spirit of God ? The test is simple :—Have you such a measure of light in your understanding as to

* Buchanan on the “ Work of the Spirit ;” page 485.

produce a *sense of guilt*? Have you such a view of your lost state as sinners, as that you have been brought to *feel your need of a Saviour*? If so, you are the subjects of conviction. It is true, conviction may, or it may not, in your case, be accompanied by horror, by remorse, or by a feeling bordering on despair. These often result from deep and vivid views of the heinousness of sin, and of the peculiar aggravations of our individual crimes, but they enter not into the essence of conviction.* Conviction is not

* "You are not to suppose that you do not repent, because you have never been the subject of overwhelming terror and excessive grief. Persons in the first stages of religious impression are sometimes cast down and discouraged, because they do not feel those agonizing and terrifying convictions, that some, whom they have heard or read of, have experienced. Others, again, are greatly troubled because they do not and cannot shed tears and utter groans, under a sense of sin, as some do. If they could either be wrought up to terror, or melted into weeping, they should then take some comfort, and have some hope that their convictions were genuine. . . . But is not this putting feeling in the place of the work of Christ? . . . I do not for a moment mean to throw suspicion over the experience of those who have been called through a state of conviction, which, on account of its terrific alarms and unutterable anguish, may be called the valley of the shadow of death. By no means. God has

the less real because accompanied by these emotions, but it may be equally genuine where they have had no existence in the bosom. The one great point is, to be brought to feel that without Christ we are utterly and for ever lost,—*this is conviction*. The great, the paramount duty of this state is,—just as we are,—to cast our souls upon Christ for pardon and peace.

It is possible to lose conviction otherwise than by reposing the soul upon the merits of Christ. Many have been plunged into this “slough of despond,” but have come out of it on the wrong side. Instead of yielding to conviction they have resisted it, and have thus only made themselves more hopelessly the children of hell than before. Effectually

led some of his people, not only hard by the clouds, and blackness, and thunders, and earthquakes, and trumpet, and awful words of Sinai, but almost by the very brink of the burning pit, within sight of its flames, and within sound of its wailings : but let no man covet such a road to glory ; let no man think he has mistaken the road, because he has not witnessed these dreadful scenes in his way. All must pass by both mount Sinai and mount Calvary to heaven, but the view is neither so clear nor so impressive, of either of them, to some as to others.”—*James’ “Anxious Inquirer.”*

to stifle the voice of conscience and the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, they have more fearlessly and recklessly engaged in the practice of iniquity, and the consequence has been that the last state of those men "has been worse than the first." This is the peculiar danger of individuals passing through this stage of Christian experience. It becomes, then, the convinced sinner to be specially careful ; to guard against every "refuge of lies ;" to be on the watch against every thing calculated to lull conscience into a state of false repose. Convictions have been lodged within the bosom ; upon their issue depends the everlasting state of the party concerned. They are there,—how produced, or what their depth or force, it matters not. They will prove a blessing or a curse. Improved,—they will lead to heaven. Disregarded,—they will aggravate the horrors of hell. Life or death,—a blessing or a curse,—these are the great points suspended on the issue of conviction. Oh, the unspeakable importance of acting aright ! Convinced sinner ! perchance upon the resolves of this

hour hangs thy everlasting fate. The cross is before thee : haste thee to it ! The “ avenger of blood ” is at thy heels, but the “ city of refuge ” lies in thy path. Flee, O man, flee, for heaven depends upon thy speed ! Once arrested in thy course, thou art undone for ever : once safe within the gates of the city, triumphantly thou mayest sing,—“ Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died ! ” “ There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

CONCLUSION.

1.—To those happy individuals who have already attained unto the enjoyment of this divine testimony, and who live habitually in the possession of an assurance of their adoption into the family of God, we would speak in language of high congratulation and of holy joy. How great is the love manifested to believers in the bestowment of this blessing ! How numerous and precious the privileges sealed and secured to the saint by this

heavenly witness. "Beloved," said the seraphic John,—“now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” No human tongue can describe all the blessedness in reserve for the man, “whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.” No finite mind can conceive all those pure and elevated pleasures which shall eternally spring from a state of happy relationship to God. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Infinity stretches out before the view, but what new discoveries of divine wisdom, and goodness, and grace, we shall be permitted to make, we know not. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be!” Eternity opens up before the vision, but into what new and more exalted states of spiritual being we shall be ushered, it is impossible for us now to divine. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Rejoice, O saint, that thou art an “heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ.” Be glad, and sing: for “all

are yours ;" because "ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's."

This relationship, however, to the Divine Being, we have already stated, is not only marked by privileges, it is likewise connected with duties. Adoption is not a mere relation ; the privilege and the image of the sons of God go together. This change in man's position towards his Maker is ever accompanied by a corresponding change in man's *views and feelings* towards him ; hence the believer is under solemn obligation to cherish filial affections and to engage in filial acts. There is in the saint a spiritual resemblance to God, a moral conformity to the divine will. As one beautifully expresses it, —"The child of God answers to the divine image, as the impression on the wax does to the engraving on the seal. The likeness, it is true, is immensely distant from the original, so faint is the copy, yet the likeness is there. The seal has been applied to the wax, and the identical features have left their stamp." There is no adoption without regeneration ; a state of adoption is never

without a separation from defilement ; consequently, if we would retain our evidence of acceptance with God bright and unobscured, we must see to it that we ever "walk worthy of the Lord to all well pleasing:" that we remain "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

2.—To those who desire to enjoy the witness of the Spirit, we have addressed several directions already. We would only further add, that in order to obtain it there must be **EARNESTNESS**. Think not that a blessing so invaluable is to be secured by merely wishing for it. "Strive," said the Saviour, "to enter in at the strait gate ; for many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able." "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." In order to obtain this "pearl of great price," we must "seek it as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure." "The soul of the sluggard desireth but hath nothing." If, indeed, we would possess this invaluable boon, we must wrestle with God, as Jacob did with the Angel, humbly, yet firmly, saying, "I will not

let thee go, unless thou bless me." And, at the time of our extremity, in the very moment of self-despair,—*then*, will God manifest himself as our Saviour, and reveal himself as our Father and Friend.

3.—To those who once possessed this divine witness, but who, by unwatchfulness and sin, have forfeited the consciousness of adoption, we would address the solemn language of offended Deity,—“Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else, I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Let such tremble lest their infidelity should triumph; lest their minds should be darkened; lest God should give them over to the hardness of reprobate hearts; and, lest in his anger he should swear,—“They shall not enter into my rest.” Oh! it is a fearful thing to have spurned from the heart the Divine Spirit; to have renounced a Father’s love; to have “crucified afresh the Son of God, and put him to an open shame!” But, wondrous compas-

sion ! “His mercy is not clean gone for ever.” Let the backslider now approach the divine footstool, and with an intensity of feeling becoming the urgency of his case, let him cry,—“ Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit !” and that God who hath said, “ Return unto me, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings,” will once more manifest himself to be a “ God ready to pardon.” The poor returning prodigal shall again be made welcome to his Father’s house, and heaven’s vast regions shall ring with the enraptured song,—“ The dead’s alive ; the lost is found.” But, perversely remaining in impenitence ; insultingly responding to the calls of God to return, in the language of apostate Israel, “ Wherein shall we return ?” the fearful sentence shall be realized,—“ He that being often reprov’d, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”—“ Because I have called, and ye have refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none

of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh ; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

Finally,—To those who are unconcerned about this testimony of the Spirit, we would speak in terms of solemn warning. You, perhaps, secretly despise what has been stated, as vanity and enthusiasm. It may be that you laugh at the idea of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and spurn from you as fanatical and absurd the doctrine of his abiding witness. Well, be it so. But, remember, there is a day coming in which the foundations shall be tried. What will you do in the "swellings of Jordan?" How do you hope to acquit yourselves in the hour and article of death—with no Holy Ghost to sustain, with no Divine Spirit to unfold bright and animating visions of futurity? What award do you anticipate from your

Judge, after the solemn scrutinies of the last great day? These are questions which you are imperatively bound to consider: these are subjects about which your most anxious thoughts should be engaged. Ponder well the important matter, and whilst the opportunities of earth are afforded, and the strengthening influences of the Spirit are vouchsafed, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

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